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April 8, 1896.

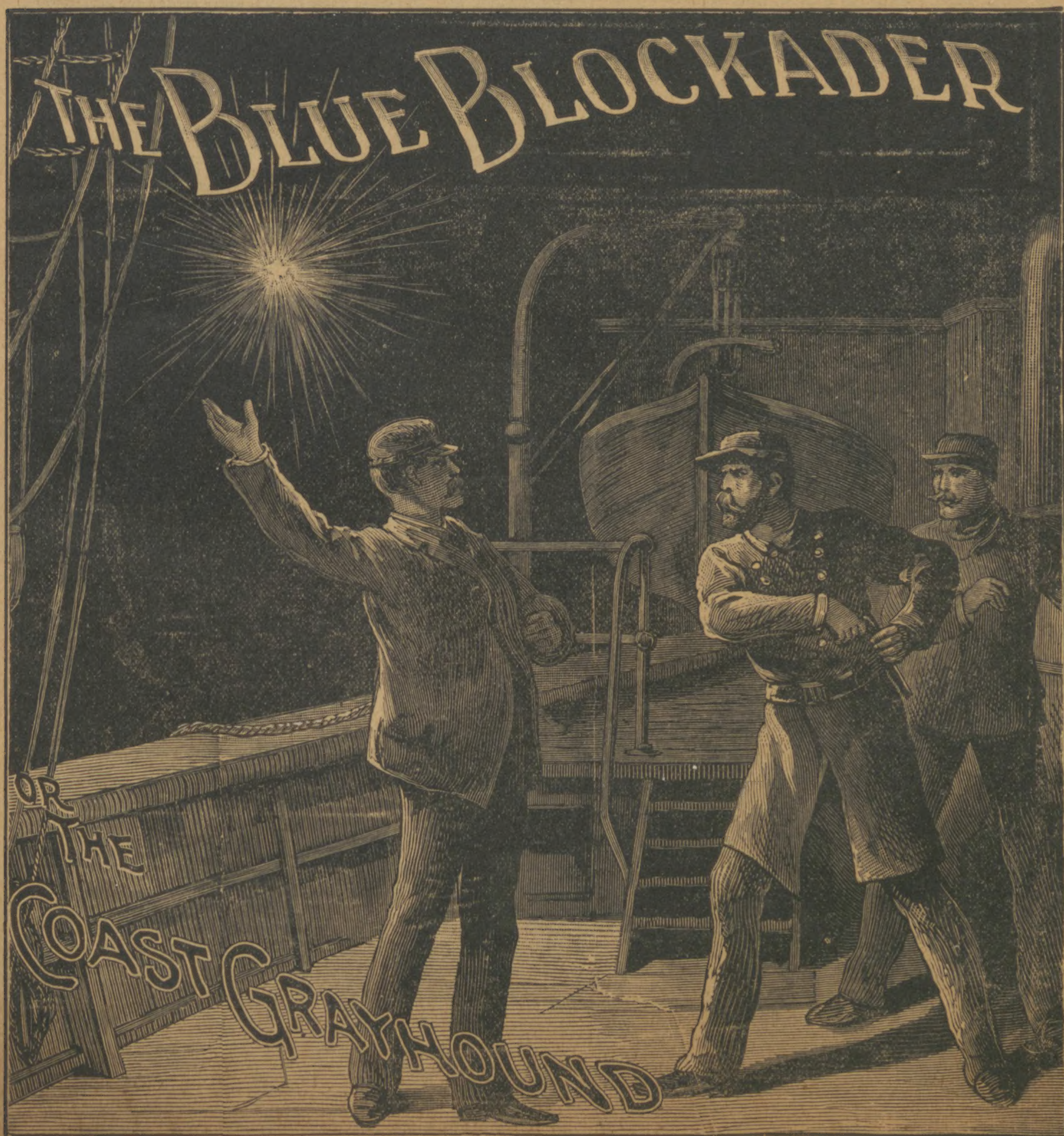
No. 911.

Published Every
Wednesday.

Beadle & Adams, Publishers,
98 WILLIAM STREET, NEW YORK.

Ten Cents a Copy.
\$5.00 a Year.

Vol. LXXI.



"TRAITOR, FOR THIS TREACHERY YOU SHALL HANG!" CRIED CATTAIN FAIRFAX.

The Blue Blockader;

OR,

THE COAST GRAYHOUND.

BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM,
AUTHOR OF "BUFFALO BILL" NOVELS, ETC.

CHAPTER I. THE BLOCKADER.

DARKNESS that was tangible upon the wind-swept waters, with not a star visible overhead to guide the bold mariner upon his way.

Here and there in the blackness a light glimmered, dancing about in a way that proves it to be upon some vessel, and a closer inspection shows that each craft that bears a light is riding at anchor.

Here, there, they glimmer, their light seeming alone proof that all is not chaos as before the creation.

Vessels-of-war they are, a stately frigate there, a trim brig here, and there steam cruisers a score in number, some small, others large, but all well armed and manned.

Silent as death, and, but for the one light visible upon each, as dark as the tomb, they ride at single anchor and seem to have no crew, for not a man is visible upon their decks.

Why this darkness and silence upon a large fleet?

The answer is in five words:

It is a blockading squadron.

Lying in ambush, as it were, the vessels-of-war are keeping watch and ward over a Southern port, grim sentinels, dangerous, deadly, silent but ready to capture the daring craft that ventures to pass in or out of the harbor beyond, where a slight glow is visible, telling of the town upon its shores.

Lying off upon the waters, with no light visible, looking like a black phantom, is another vessel, but not at anchor.

Is it an advance sentry of the fleet, further out toward the sea, or the vessel of the enemy watching the blockading squadron?

Though no light is visible about her, from her escape-pipes comes a moaning sound, as though she was breathing hard in anticipation of a death-struggle.

About her decks move forms silently, words are spoken in a whisper, and all eyes seem turned toward the lights, which, like twinkling stars mark the fleet of blockaders.

"There are seventeen of them, Captain Fairfax," said a man, approaching one who stood alone upon the quarter-deck, excepting the man at the wheel, who was at his post, his hands resting upon the spokes mechanically.

"So I noted, Dabney, and they are stretched out as nicely as possible across the channel," was the reply of the one addressed.

Then others came aft and made to him their whispered reports, until five men stood in a group upon the quarter-deck, all with glasses in their hands, watching the fleet that looked like fire-flies as the vessels danced upon the waves.

"It is so fearfully dark I almost fear to venture, sir, even if you give the word, for I cannot tell just where lies the shore, as only those lights are to be seen," said one of the party turning to the commander of the vessel.

"I shall go in, pilot, if it grows so black I cannot see you at the wheel, for I have stores and ammunition the Government need greatly, and the risk must be taken be it ever so great."

There was a ring in the voice that was manly and resolute, and the man he addressed as pilot replied:

"You know best, sir, and I but obey your orders."

"Then take the wheel and let us be moving," was the calm response.

And a low order was sent along the ship for every man to take his post, as the gantlet of death was about to be run.

A smothered jingle of the bell as a signal to go ahead, and the paddle-wheels* began to turn slowly and drive the long, rakish craft through the sea.

Nearer and nearer it drew to the twinkling lights of the blockading squadron, until the nearest one could not be more than half a mile away.

But no sign had been given on the fleet that the daring vessel had been discovered.

Upon the deck, searching the seas with his glass, stood the commander, silent, stern, resolute, and within reach of his hand was the pilot at the wheel.

"Pilot, you have passed into their lines, sir, for yonder lies a vessel without a light; ay, and another to leeward, so that we have run between them."

"Why have you come this course, sir, when you could have kept close in under the shore?"

There was a slight tinge of suspicion in the

*The blockade runners of '61 to '65 were side-wheelers, as trim a craft as ever floated.—THE AUTHOR.

voice of the commander, and for an instant the pilot made no reply; but then he said:

"I took this course because there is plenty of water, and it is better to run the gantlet of the fleet's guns than to run aground."

"You are right there; but we are now completely surrounded by them, and to be discovered here is almost sure death or capture."

"Then death it shall be to you, Victor Fairfax, for in your pilot, now recognize your old rival, Ernest Fenton."

As the pilot spoke he suddenly ignited a blue-light, and cast it from him, and instantly the blackness of night was gone, and the daring blockade-runner was revealed as by noonday's glare to the Federal fleet.

"Traitor, for this treachery you shall hang!" cried Captain Fairfax, as he covered the pilot with his revolver.

"Seize him, men!" he called out the next moment, and the officers near rushed upon the pilot, who, waiting until they were about to seize him, turned suddenly and sprung overboard into the sea.

An instant all gazed after him, and then as the darkness came again upon the waters, a darkness more intense from the going out of the lurid glare of the blue-light, the voice of the blockade captain rung out like a trumpet with:

"To your posts, all! I shall run this vessel through or die in the attempt!"

A wild cheer broke from officers and men together, and the commander sprung to the wheel, the bell was rung to go ahead at full speed, and the vessel surged forward under the rapid turning of the huge wheels.

As she did so, here, there, everywhere it seemed, the skies were rent with fiery serpents, as alarm rockets were sent up from the different vessels, and a moment after came the deep boom of a heavy gun and the roar of the iron missile as it was hurled from the cannon's brazen mouth at the blockade-runner.

But it missed its mark, going over the deck with the sound as of a thousand fluttering wings.

Hardly had it fallen into the sea when there came from another quarter a second gun, then a third, a fourth, and so on until the waters were illumined with the red glare from the cannons' mouths, and the spectacle was one of appalling grandeur.

Blackness all around the illumined circle of light, inky clouds overhead, and from a score of vessels a crashing of artillery, the red flashes incessant as heat-lightning, and the pealing of the great guns as terrific as thunder.

In their midst a long, rakish craft, lying low in the water, painted a dark-blue, showing no light, her men at their posts of duty, silent, grim and watching their foes alternately with their daring commander who stood at the wheel of his vessel, to guide her through her desperate danger.

No sound from her other than the rapid swish of her paddles as they cut the waters, and moving like the very wind she went on her way, while over her, about her, occasionally striking her a telling blow, flew the iron shot and shell, the latter bursting in mid-air over her, aboard and astern of her, revealing her to her enemies.

With anchors now up, and under pressure of steam the fleet of war-vessels began to move toward a common center, and that center was to encircle the blockade-runner.

That she could escape from that network of death seemed impossible; but stern, silent and determined her commander held on his way, for he had given his word to go through the iron gantlet to the goal beyond, or die.

CHAPTER II.

THE BLOCKADER CAPTAIN.

THE light of bursting shells revealed fully the vessel, her crew, and the central figure of all, her commander.

The vessel was of a type built for speed alone, lying low in the water, barque-rigged and carrying plenty of canvas to set in case of necessity.

Her crew were dressed in sailor costume of white duck pants, blue woolen shirts, and a skull-cap of brilliant blue.

She carried no guns, and yet along her bulwarks were pikes for repelling boarders, cutlasses and pistols, while about the masts were rifles for ready use.

Trim in every particular, from deck to topmast, before attempting to run the dread blockade, she was now passing through an ordeal of death and destruction, for the iron, so to speak, was entering deep into her soul, her decks were strewn with the dead and the dying, and her bulwarks had been shattered, her sides pierced and her spars splintered by the hail of iron turned upon her.

Still on her way she sped, receiving and not giving back, silent, but for the groans of her wounded men and the splash of her rapidly-revolving wheels.

An officer, in dark-blue coat, and light-blue cap and pants, trimmed with gold, stood forward watching her course, another paced to and fro amidships and a third stood aft, near

her commander, who held the wheel in his firm grasp.

He was a young man, scarcely over twenty-seven, with tall, erect form, broad shoulders and a slender waist.

His feet and hands were small and shapely, yet the latter showed great power as they grasped the wheel with a grip that could not be shaken off.

The face was that of a man who knew no fear, full of soul, of daring and stern resolve, yet strangely handsome withal, with his bronzed complexion, dark eyes and waving hair.

His eyes were fixed unflinchingly upon his course, though ahead all was darkness, and he could but steer at a venture, from the remembrance of his situation and how the waters lay ahead of him at his start on the run through the fleet.

In the blinding glare of the bursting shells and smoke of the discharging guns, he could not catch sight of a light he hoped for, he looked for, far ahead, where he knew lay the Confederate fort, whose shelter he longed for.

And about the Blue Blockader the circle of war vessels narrowed, and ahead, in her path lay one that she must pass very near to, perhaps collide with, perhaps go down under her broadside.

"Order the utmost speed, Mr. Howard," called out the commander, and suddenly his eyes fell upon a cruiser coming up upon his starboard bow.

"If there is water enough for her, Howard, there is for us, and I will strike at her, rather than at the larger cruiser now in our course."

"Order sail set, for the wind is fair, and we may be crippled in our engines by a broadside. Set everything that will draw, for this breeze above will drive us eight knots."

"Will the men set sail under this fire, Captain Fairfax," asked Dabney Howard, who was the first officer of the Blue Blockader.

"I never ask my men what they will do, I order them, Mr. Howard," was the stern rejoinder, and raising his voice to clarion tones, Victor Fairfax commanded:

"All hands ahoy to set sail!"

"Into the rigging all of you, and set every stitch of canvas that will draw!"

The men started at the command, and all eyes turned upon her commander; but not a man moved.

Then came in thunder tones, as the young captain saw the hesitancy of the crew:

"Obey my orders, men, or by the God above, I will blow this vessel into fragments with all on board!"

"Into the rigging, I say!" and Captain Fairfax sprung from the wheel, leaving it in the hands of Lieutenant Howard.

That crew knew its commander, and terrified at the threat, they obeyed, running up into the rigging and hastily setting sail, until the vessel looked like a flying cloud trailing over the wind-swept waters.

With her canvas set the Blockader became, of course, a better target for the fire of the fleet, and hotter and hotter flew the shells about her, some cutting rents in her white sails, others splintering masts and spars, and a few tearing along the decks and through the bulwarks.

Here and there a man dropped from the rigging, dead or dying, the latter shrieking as he fell, and on deck the crew suffered severely; but on sped the brave Blue Blockader, the wind blowing half a gale astern of her, and her paddle-wheels turning with frightful velocity.

Her wonderful speed seemed alone to save her, and one large vessel that had intended to check her headway drew off from before her, well knowing the result, while she fired an angry broadside at her as she fairly flew by, a cable's length distant.

"That fellow yonder means to give us trouble," said Victor Fairfax, as he saw the cruiser on his port bow, and before referred to, steaming so as to head him off and run him down.

"It seems, sir, as though he was willing to lose his vessel to destroy us," Lieutenant Howard returned, and he gazed anxiously at the vessel, which was not unlike the Blue Blockader, though larger and apparently heavily armed, from the fire she now opened upon the chase.

"If we pass her we are all right, for I got a glimpse of the fort's lights an instant ago, and we will make it," was the cool reply.

"He intends to bar our way, sir."

"Let him do so, and you come here and aid me at the wheel, Howard, for I shall trick him, as our only chance."

The cruiser was now dead ahead, lying broadside across the course of the Blue Blockader as it was then heading, and with her guns run out was firing raking shots to cripple her as she came on.

"You do not intend to run him down, sir?" asked Dabney Howard, as Victor Fairfax held on unswervingly, and his manner showed dread of such an alternative.

"Wait and see, and stand ready to give me your whole strength when I need it."

"With pleasure, Captain Fairfax," was the ready reply of the young lieutenant, who had the utmost confidence in his commander.

The crew now began to show uneasiness, far

more than the shells bursting about them had caused, and all eyes were bent upon the commander.

The fleet suddenly ceased firing, as they were now all astern, excepting the cruiser ahead of the Blue Blockader, and her guns revealed the position of both vessels.

On that one vessel the hopes of the blockading squadron depended, for having run the terrible gantlet thus far, did she escape the last cruiser, the Blue Blockader had triumphed, though great was the cost.

Seeing the Blockader coming like a tornado upon them, and with the seeming intention of running them down, hoping thus to escape in some miraculous way, the crew of the cruiser began to fire with great rapidity to cripple the craft ere she could carry out her desperate intention.

Nearer and nearer drew the Blue Blockader, and hotter and hotter came the fire of the cruiser, though without seeming effect; and every heart in the fleet seemed to stand still as officers and men gazed appalled upon the scene.

Nearer and nearer they came, and hotter and fiercer the guns roared, and both vessels were now in the circle of their light, seen by all in the squadron and hundreds on the fort, a league away, who breathlessly watched the desperate struggle of the gallant craft to reach the goal of safety.

Whether unnerved, or too eager to do damage, the gunners aimed untrue, and their shells burst about the Blue Blockader with but trifling damage to life and vessel.

On, on, driven by a gale of wind and steam, driving directly before it, rushed the Blue Blockader, directly for her foe.

Would the cruiser move from her path, or would she receive the terrific blow, knowing that by her sacrifice she doomed the other?

The crew of the cruiser gazed at their commander to read their fate, and the men on the Blue Blockader tried to read in the calm countenance of their young captain if he meant to do a deed so desperate.

Nearer and nearer, until only a length divided the two.

Would the cruiser's commander yield and order his engineer to go forward with all speed?

Would the Blockader captain carry out his seeming intention to strike his foe amidships and cut her in twain?

Neither commander seemed to yield, the one apparently determined to destroy the Blockader at the sacrifice of his own vessel, the other bent on escaping by this desperate means rather than to surrender with the goal so near ahead.

A moment more and the crash would have come, when the Blockader captain cried in a voice that rung like bugle notes:

"Now, Howard, for life! hard, hard down your helm!"

Together they threw their weight upon the wheel, while two crews stood breathless, and the sharp bows of the Blue Blockader swerved with a suddenness that made her heel far over, and not a second too soon, and then came a crash, wild cries, and rising above all, the same ringing voice:

"Port, hard aport! and hold her on her course once more, Howard!"

There were oaths both loud and deep, crashing of timbers, the fluttering of sails temporarily freed from the wind, the cheers of the blockaders, the roar of a heavy gun, and the Blue Blockader shot on her way, having torn a big hole in the stern of the cruiser, broken her rudder-chains, and crippled her beyond instant pursuit.

As the Blue Blockader was close aboard, in the moment following the crash, Victor Fairfax beheld the commander of the cruiser, and called out:

"Ho, Marsden, old shipmate, a pleasanter meeting next time!"

"Victor Fairfax, by the gods of war!" cried the cruiser's commander, raising his cap and waving it in acknowledgment of the daring of the blockader captain, who was flying away in triumph out of the jaws of death, leaving his foes to mourn his loss while lost in admiration at his superb courage.

CHAPTER III.

THE PILOT'S PLEDGE.

OUT of the depths came the cry:

"Ahoy! ship ahoy! ahoy!"

It startled the crew of a vessel-of-war, who were at their guns, pouring a hot fire upon the Blue Blockader, as she sped along, winding her way among the fleet to reach the port for which she risked so much, and seeming to bear a charmed life as she went through the iron storm poured upon her.

"Ahoy! ship ahoy!"

Again the cry came from the waters ere the astonished crew whose ears it reached could report it aft to the quarter-deck.

But now it rung out with wild distinctness, as though a cry of desperation, and back came the response from an officer on the quarter-deck:

"Ahoy! who hails, and where?"

"Here, in the sea! I am drowning, so, for the love of God, save me!"

The voice was weaker now, and most pleading, and the officer gave orders to stop the vessel's headway and lower a boat, then calling out:

"Ay, ay, my man, bear up yet awhile."

"You must hurry, for I cannot last much longer!" came back the cry.

Quickly the boat was lowered, willing arms sent it over the rough waters, and in ten minutes it had returned bearing the rescued man.

"What are you doing afloat in such a night as this, my man?" asked the officer, after he had ordered the vessel under way again, and the firing to be resumed at the now far distant blockade-runner.

"I was the pilot of yonder blockader, sir, and sprung into the sea to save my life," said the man, and he was trembling from head to foot.

"Ah! you are then an important personage," and raising his voice, the officer called out:

"Captain Lamar, this man says that he sprung off of the blockader to save his life, and was its pilot."

"Ha! is that Captain Leonard Lamar?" asked the pilot, starting back, and seemingly excited.

"It is, come with me," and the man was led to where the vessel's commander stood, eagerly watching the flying blockader, and surrounded by a group of officers.

"Mr. Rose, give orders to cease firing, for we can do that flying machine no harm now, and may hit some of our own vessels; but he cannot escape, for all of his marvelous pluck," said Captain Lamar, lowering his glass and then turning to the pilot, who said, with a respectful salute:

"Yes, Captain Lamar, that blockader will escape, for Satan takes care of his own."

"Ah! you are the one who was picked out of the sea just now?"

"I am, Captain Lamar."

"And I should know you, as you do me?"

"My beard changes me, Captain Lamar."

"I am Ernest Fenton, sir, I may as well admit."

"Yes, I know you now, Fenton; but how is it we picked you out of the sea?" coldly asked the captain, not seeing the hand stretched out to him, as if for a grasp for old friendship's sake, and then quickly withdrawn.

"I was pilot on the blockader, sir, and tried to betray her to the fleet by burning a blue-light, as you doubtless saw, when her commander ordered me seized and swung up, and I sprung into the sea."

"I cannot blame him for that, Fenton, for all honest men hate a traitor; but I am sorry your act did not cause us to capture the blockade-runner, as I almost fear she will escape, for she has passed all now but Marsden's vessel."

"Is Lieutenant Marsden on this station too?" quickly asked the pilot.

"He is, and commands the vessel now lying in the course of the blockade-runner—Great God! does the daring fellow mean to run Marsden's ship down?"

"No, he swerves, and nearly goes over doing so—oh! hear that crash as they come together—there! by the Lord Harry, the daring rascal has gone clear and escaped."

"Too bad! too bad! but the brave fellow deserves his success, bitterly as it falls upon our squadron," and Captain Lamar, with a word for a gallant foe, turned away deeply chagrined, while the pilot asked:

"Do you know the name of that blockade-runner, Captain Lamar?"

"I do not."

"She is named the Sea Rebel, but is known by the blockading squadrons off Charleston and Wilmington, through which she has twice successfully run, as the Blue Blockader, for she is painted indigo-blue, a hard color to distinguish upon the waters by day or night."

"I have heard of her as the most daring of these daring blockade-runners," returned Captain Lamar, but with a manner that showed he cared not to talk to the man he had picked up out of the sea.

"Do you know who her commander is?" asked Ernest Fenton, with the air of one who had something of importance to communicate.

"I do not, sir; doubtless some English naval officer, lured by large reward to command her."

"He is no Englishman, Captain Lamar; but a Southerner, and one whom you know."

"His name is Victor Fairfax."

Captain Lamar started, half turned away, and then said:

"Fenton, I would like to see you in my cabin, as soon as the steward has given you some dry clothing, which I should have thought of for you before."

"Mr. Rose, keep the vessel about her present locality, and have a bright watch kept for another blockade-runner, for there are generally two or more of them together," and Captain Lamar entered his cabin, where the pilot soon after joined him, having been rigged out in a dry suit.

"Be seated, Fenton, and take a glass of brandy, for you look chilled," and the captain

motioned to a decanter and glasses that were upon the cabin buffet.

"Thank you, Captain Lamar, but rum caused my downfall, brought me to what I now am, and I never touch it."

"I am glad to hear you say that, Ernest Fenton, and I hope you may keep your good resolve."

"You certainly started out in the world with a good name, and with riches, you stood well in the navy, and a bright future was before you; but you preferred a course which brought dishonor upon you, and as you sowed, you have reaped."

"And bitter indeed has been the reaping, Captain Lamar, sad indeed my lot in life; but I have determined to again win the respect of those who knew me, and, but for the fact that Victor Fairfax seemed to suspect me, and I was thus forced to betray the Sea Rebel too soon, before she got into the trap I was taking her into, I would have enabled her to be taken and thus begun my good work to regain my commission in the navy."

"You are a Southerner, Fenton?"

"Yes, sir, as you know, a Virginian."

"You enlisted in the Southern service, doubtless?"

"Yes, sir."

"And begin your reformation by treachery, in betraying your trust as an officer?"

Ernest Fenton saw the scorn in the eyes of the United States commander, and for a moment he sat in silence, while the blood rushed in shame over his face.

The two men were widely different, the naval officer being a man of fifty, with a noble, kindly face, though full of courage and firmness.

His form was full and he wore the uniform of a captain in the United States Navy.

The pilot was a man slightly above the medium height, with a fine form and bearing, and a face that would have been handsome, and was, to the casual observer, only it was marred by a look of recklessness allied with deceit.

He was about thirty years of age, had a restless, almost nervous manner, and a voice that was strangely musical and winning in its tone.

In response to the cutting words of the naval officer, he replied, after a moment's hesitation, and with a gesture of impatience:

"Captain Lamar, I entered the Southern service as a pilot, believing that I could better serve my country, for I am loyal to the Union, by running into the clutches of our navy the blockade-runners that are entering Southern ports with most valuable cargoes of arms, ammunition and stores for the Confederates."

"And to do this you shipped on board of the vessel of a man who was once your friend, who saved your life, as I know, for, your former friendship for him turning to hatred, you meant to get him taken or killed, while he, forgetting the past, trusted you."

"Captain Lamar, Fairfax did not know who I was until the moment I burned the blue-light to warn the fleet that a runner was trying to enter the harbor."

"Your beard changes you wonderfully, I admit; but you certainly knew Fairfax?"

"I did, and I meant to destroy him," was the fierce reply.

"I thought so; but, Fenton, I have no sympathy with the South, for I am a Northern man, do not believe in the disruption of our country, and shall do all in my power to put down rebellion; but, mark me, I am not going to do one act treacherously to gain the end, and I can but despise you for shipping on the Blue Blockader to betray her, and had Fairfax swung you up to the yard-arm I would not have censured him."

"He would have done so had I not sprung into the sea as I did; but, Captain Lamar, I believe I can yet win my former rank by aiding the Government vessels to catch these blockade-runners; ay, and I would ask you if I do, if you will again allow me to visit your home, your daughter, in fact?"

"No, sir! emphatically, no, sir!" rung out the stern response of Captain Lamar, while he added, speaking with evident feeling:

"You were once, sir, a suitor for my daughter's hand; but thank Heaven her eyes saw deeper than mine, and she never allied herself to one who is so utterly unworthy."

"Captain Lamar, I am on board your vessel, where you have the power to speak to me as you please," and Ernest Fenton's voice quivered with passion.

"Egad, sir, I will go ashore with you on the morrow and repeat my words," was the quick reply, but a moment after repented of, for he added:

"Pardon me, Fenton, for you are my guest though an uninvited one."

"I will relieve your ship, sir, of my presence as soon as it is in my power to do so; but when you refer to your daughter seeing deeper into my character than you did, I will defend myself by saying that she was willing to have me for her lover until she met that arch-rebel, Victor Fairfax, and then his handsome face and fascinating manners cast a glamour over her which caused her to turn a cold shoulder to me."

"Then it was that I began to suffer from un-

reciprocated love, and suffering, I became wild and reckless."

"It is cowardly, Fenton, to lay your sins upon my child's shoulders; but we will refer to her no more, and I can only say that while on board this vessel you are my guest, but what you choose to do after you leave is your own affair, only let our paths in life be separate," and Captain Lamar's manner showed that he felt the interview was at an end, but the pilot said:

"May I ask, sir, to be put on board the fleet commodore's ship in the morning, for he may listen to what I have to say?"

"Certainly, I will send you there, and doubtless the commodore will be glad of your services; but he cannot but regard you as I do, for playing the part of friendship to be treacherous in the end," and Captain Lamar left the cabin and went on deck, while Ernest Fenton remained seated where he was.

A moment he sat there, and then his eyes fell upon an open letter lying upon the table.

He started, glanced eagerly over the lines, and then said, with a look of malice and hatred combined:

"Aha! the sweet Belle Lamar is not North, as I supposed, but sojourning not far from her father's anchorage, in a pleasant house on the shores of the bay."

"Now will be the time for me to act, and I pledge myself she shall rue the day she cast off Ernest Fenton."

CHAPTER IV.

DARED FOR LOVE.

UPON the beautiful shores of a Southern bay, not many leagues from the city of M—, still stands a lordly mansion, surrounded by vast ornamental grounds, and with a forest of majestic pines and magnolias in the rear.

It was then a plantation home, the residence of a widow of wealth and refinement, and it had descended to her through several generations.

The mansion was large and rambling, being but one story in height, but with spacious rooms, several wings, bow windows, and innumerable piazzas and balconies, which gave it a most attractive appearance.

It was furnished with elegance and an eye to perfect luxury, and from its piazzas a grand view of the bay, the circling shores, the highland across the waters and the vessels of the blockading squadron could be seen.

The grounds were tastefully laid out, and flowers from every clime scented the air with their sweet perfume, while here and there was a massive live oak tree, breaking the velvet-like grass of the lawn, and an arbor hiding away amid a group of cedars, or arbor-vitæ trees.

In the rear of the mansion were the outbuildings, with the negro-quarters visible far back through a vista in the forest.

Upon a point of land, forming the sheltering arm of a small cove, used as the harborage for the little boats belonging to the plantation, was a small fort or earthwork, above which floated the stars and stripes.

A sentinel in the uniform of a United States infantry soldier, was pacing the ramparts, through which frowned the muzzles of half a dozen cannon, while in the rear, amid the pines, was a camp over which also floated the American flag.

A league off-shore was the blockading fleet, which had in vain tried to capture the Blue Blockader the night before, for this scene is presented to the reader the morning after the daring run of Captain Fairfax through the midst of the United States cruisers.

In front of the mansion, jutting out from the sandy shore for a hundred yards, is a rustic pier, upon the end of which is a pretty pavilion, serving both as a bath-house and outlook.

In it are an easy-chair and a table, the latter having upon it a silver ice-pitcher and goblets and a number of books.

There was an occupant of the pavilion, a young girl of nineteen, with a face full of fascination, a form that was perfection and grace.

Her hair was of a bronze hue that was very rich, and her eyes possessed a power that was irrepressible.

She was dressed in a morning-robe of some light fabric, and while a book lay open in her lap her eyes seemed fixed upon a boat that was pulling shoreward from the fleet, and with the evident intention of landing at the little pier.

"Now I will know what all that firing was about last night, for it was far too heavy for simply a blockade-runner passing in," she murmured.

Soon after the boat, urged by four oarsmen, and containing besides a middy and coxswain, ran up to the water-stairs.

The midshipman sprang out, and raising his cap politely as he advanced, said:

"I bring a letter to you, Miss Lamar, and some papers, from your father, for a flag of truce boat just came down from the town and are full of the triumph over us last night of the Blue Blockader."

"I thank you, Midshipman Grayson, and I am glad to know what all the firing was about, I confess, as all day my woman's curiosity has

distressed me not to discover; but was it only a blockade runner passing in?"

"Yes, Miss Lamar; but it was the boldest act any man in our fleet ever witnessed, and the man who commanded her would be made a commodore in our service—his name, the papers say, was Victor Fairfax, and he was formerly an officer in our navy, but resigned and turned rebel—but are you ill, Miss Lamar?" and the midshipman seemed alarmed as he saw Belle Lamar start, turn deadly pale and then flush crimson.

"No, thank you, it was merely—merely—a slight and sudden indisposition, Mr. Grayson; but does my father's letter call for a response?"

"He simply told me to give it to you with the papers."

"I will see, if you will pardon me," and she hastily glanced over the letter, which, after speaking of some minor matters, contained the following:

"You doubtless heard what a cannonading the fleet kept up last night, and all on account of a blockade-runner, commanded by your old lover, now a rebel, Victor Fairfax, who ran the most daring and desperate gantlet ever known."

"By a flag of truce boat from the town to-day we received some Southern papers which I send you, and I desire also to say that your former lover, Ernest Fenton, was the pilot of the Blue Blockader, turned traitor and betrayed her presence to the fleet, after which he sprang into the sea, to escape hanging at the hands of Fairfax, and was picked up by a boat from my vessel."

"He has sunk lower than ever in my estimation, but has gone on board the flag-ship, where he intends to urge the commodore to let him carry out some plans he has for capturing blockade-runners."

"There is no answer, Mr. Grayson, other than to tell my father that I am well, and hope he will visit me when he can," she said, and the midshipman's keen eyes detected that something moved the maiden deeply; but he bowed, and reëntering his boat rowed away back toward the fleet, just as a negro came down the long pier from the mansion, and entering the pavilion, said:

"Missy Belle, I has a letter for you."

"A letter for me, Ebon?" asked the maiden, with surprise.

"Yes, missy, but you must not tell nothin' about how I got it; but you see I has a brother livin' in town, who is hired out to a navy officer, and he come to see me this morning and gave me this note for you, and he's gone back now," and Ebon, who was the coachman of the plantation, handed to Belle Lamar a letter.

She started and turned white, as she glanced at the address, recognizing the writing, and said, as quietly as she could:

"Oh, yes, it is from an old friend, Ebon, and I will not say anything about it, to get you or your brother into trouble."

"I knows dat, missy, I knows you won't; but den dese is ticklish times, and one don't know who ter trust," and Ebon bowed with the courtly manner of well-reared Southern negroes, and retraced his way toward the mansion, while Belle Lamar threw herself into her chair, and said, excitedly:

"Oh, why has he written to me?"

"Why would he not let the dead past bury its dead, for we can be nothing to each other now?"

But she broke the seal, and read with eager earnestness each word, as follows:

"Will Miss Lamar grant me an interview at ten to-night, at the pavilion upon the end of the pier of the Breakers Plantation, as what I have to say is most important to her, as well as a cause of serious anxiety to the writer, whom she will doubtless recall by my writing, for I dare only subscribe myself

"YOUR FRIEND?"

"Why will he force me to this meeting, and what has he most important to tell me?"

"Dare I meet him?"

"Ah! I must, for he comes here within our lines, and death, an ignominious death would follow his capture, and this must not be, so I will go."

Having made up her mind to this course, she unfolded one of the papers, and her face flushed from some cause, as she read the headlines:

"THE DEATH-GANTLET RUN BY THE SEA REBEL!"

"CAPTAIN VICTOR FAIRFAX'S BOLD DEED!"

"THE MOST DARING DEED OF THE WAR!"

Then followed a glowing account of the run through the Federal fleet of the Blue Blockader, with the highest eulogies upon her young commander, and the immense value of the service he had done in bringing a vessel loaded with arms and ammunition into port.

"He is indeed the bravest of the brave, for that was a most daring act, and I am glad that I did not know that he was on board, for, as it was, the Blue Blockader held my sympathy against so many foes as she had," and so saying Belle Lamar gathered up her papers and went toward the house.

Upon the piazza sat an elderly lady, one with a stern face, though not unkindly, and she greeted her pleasantly as she came up, saying:

"Belle, an invitation has come from the fort for us to go there to attend a dramatic and musical entertainment the soldiers have gotten up, and I accepted for us both."

"I am sorry, Aunt Ellen, for I must decline, as I am not feeling just myself and shall retire to my room as soon as supper is over," was the reply, and until the negro butler announced tea the time seemed an age to the young girl.

She barely tasted the food, and kissing her aunt good-night hastened to her room, leaving a request that she should not be disturbed.

Soon after she put out the light, and, seated in darkness, she waited for the time to pass away.

She heard the plantation bell ring for nine o'clock, and drawing a wrap around her shoulders she slipped out of the silent house and wended her way to the pier.

It was a dark night, but starlight, and the waves beat mournfully upon the shore, while from the fort were wafted the sounds of music and laughter at times.

The lights from the fleet glimmered brightly, and the scene was an impressive one, as alone she reached the little pavilion.

She had not long to wait, for soon she heard the sound of oars and a boat appeared, holding but one occupant.

It reached the water-stairs, a tall, cloaked form sprang out, and as Belle Lamar saw him she cried:

"Great God, Victor Fairfax! you have entered our lines in the uniform of a Federal naval officer, and if discovered you will be hanged as a spy!"

"It was the only way I could come here, Miss Lamar; but I have the countersign for the night, so have no fear," he said, somewhat coldly.

"But why have you come?" she earnestly asked.

"To see you, to warn you of—"

"See! there comes a boat and you are lost! Fly for your life, quick, down the pier, and to the forest!"

"No, I will remain and trust to my good fortune; yes, they are coming here, and it is a boat from the fleet," he said, calmly.

There was no time now for flight, had he intended it, for the boat now ran alongside the water-stairs, an officer sprang out, and he was instantly followed by half a dozen marines.

Belle drew back in the shadow of the pavilion to hide as much as possible, but Victor Fairfax stood his ground to abide the result; but even his brave nature recoiled as he beheld before him his traitor pilot, Ernest Fenton, and heard the words, full of triumphant malice:

"Captain Victor Fairfax, I arrest you as a spy in the Federal lines, and this act will cause you to swing at the yard-arm!"

CHAPTER V.

THE TELL-TALE NOTE.

WHEN Ernest Fenton went on board the flag-ship he reported to the commodore his story, alleging that he was true to the Union, though a Southerner, that had led a wild life, but now wished to redeem himself in the eyes of all who had once known him.

"The means I take, commodore, are not perhaps the best, for it is my desire to play a double part; but then, I can render far better service, in this way, and do a vast amount of good to the United States and harm to the rebels," he said.

His manner was so frank and earnest, that he impressed the old officer most favorably, and he returned:

"I am in favor of fighting an enemy openly, Mr. Fenton, and then among those opposed to me many old-time friends; but I am from the North, and my duty is to the Government, and I shall do all in my power to put down this rebellion."

"You came near losing your life last night, according to your story, and you take your life in your hands when you go on board a blockade-runner with the avowed purpose of running them under our guns, or aground, where we can capture them; but do you know these waters well?"

"Thoroughly, sir, for I cruised here for a year as a midshipman, and later, as a lieutenant, was on the survey of this coast and its waters, so I am well acquainted with the duties I have to perform as pilot."

"I will go into the Confederate lines, reach the town, and in disguise get a position as pilot on a vessel running out, and I will arrange certain signals with you, sir, that can be given to the officers of the fleet, so that a blockade-runner can be discovered more readily."

"Now, sir, if you will allow me to be put ashore, I will at once go up to the town and begin my work."

"Become, in fact, what I might call a Sea Spy?" said Commodore Hazen, with a smile.

"Yes, sir."

"Pardon me, but are you provided with funds, Mr. Fenton?"

"Yes, sir, I have ample for all needs," and so saying the Sea Spy, as the commodore had called him, set about preparing a code of signals, with the signal officer, after which a boat took him to the shore, landing him not very far from

the little fort near "The Breakers," as the plantation of Mrs. Dorsey was called.

Leaving the beach and passing through the picket-line about the fort he gained the highway, running through the pines, just as a negro in the garb of a seaman was passing, mounted upon a mule.

"Which way, my man?" he asked, confronting the negro unexpectedly, as the latter was half asleep while riding along.

"I goin' to de plantation, sah, De Breakers, a mile away," was the reply.

And the negro looked slightly alarmed.

"Do you live there?"

"Not adzactly, sah; but my brother do."

"Ah! where are you just from?"

"Up in town, sah."

"I see; you live with the rebels?"

"Is you a Yankee, sah?" was the cautious response.

"No, I am a rebel, and I just escaped from the Yankee fleet."

"Oh, my! how did you git away, sah?"

"I pretended I was a Yankee; but I wish to buy your mule, and go on up to the town."

"He hain't wuff much, sah, and he hain't mine if he were; besides, I has got to go back myself soon, sah."

"Ah! you are just going to the plantation on an errand?"

"Yas, sah; I got a note for Miss Belle Lamar, sah."

Ernest Fenton started at the name, and asked quickly:

"Where is Miss Belle Lamar?"

"She living at De Breakers, sah, with her aunt, Mistis Dorsey, who owns my brother Ebon."

"Ah! I see; but, what is your name, my man?"

"Dan'l, sah."

"Well, Daniel, do you wish to make some money for yourself?"

"Ob course I does, massa; what man don't, be he white or black?"

"You are right, Daniel, and I will give you this gold-piece if you will let me see the letter to Miss Lamar."

"De cap'n said I was not to let anybody see it, sah."

"What captain?"

"De captain of dat debil craft dey call de Blue Blockader, sah, for de debil help her sartin, or she never come in like she did last night."

"You mean Captain Fairfax?"

"Dat's him, sah."

"Well, Daniel, he is a friend of mine, and he would not mind your showing me the letter."

"It done seal up, sah, with red wax."

"Never mind; let me see it."

Daniel took the letter from some receptacle in his shirt and handed it over.

"Yes; it is his writing and bears a seal; but I will see the contents— Ah! I can readily open it with my knife, and reseal it again after breaking it, for the F on my ring stands for Fairfax as well as Fenton— There, it is open, and no harm done."

And the man had spoken aloud, to himself rather than to the negro, who cried anxiously:

"Golly! massa, you done open dat letter and I'll catch it, sartin."

Ernest Fenton glanced over the contents without replying, while a look of intense joy came over his face.

"Aha! he will be there and so will I," he muttered, and turning to the negro he continued:

"Yes, Daniel, you'll get killed if you let them know I saw this letter, so don't be such a fool as to tell anything you know to others, as you have to me."

"There, it is sealed again, I'll put my stamp upon it," and as he spoke he drew off his seal ring, the stone of which was stamped with a letter F, and taking a match he ignited the wax and spread it over the place where it had been before.

"There, Daniel, that is as good as it was before; but don't you even speak of seeing me, for it will be known that you let me open the letter."

"Here is another gold-piece for you, and if you keep your mouth shut all will be well, while if you tell that you met me, I'll see that you get killed for it."

"Lordy, massa, I hain't gwine ter open my mouth ag'in, sah; but I thanks yer for this gold money, for it helps me along amazin', sah; but good-by, sah, for I guesses I must git along."

"Don't say you have spoken with any one?"

"No, sah, I won't," and the simple-minded negro rode on his way, while Ernest Fenton stood a moment in silence to then say aloud and with sudden earnestness:

"I'll do it!"

Instantly he retraced his way to the beach, walked along it until he came to the picket-line, and asking to see the commander was in a boat, half an hour after, being rowed out to the flagship, some miles distant.

"Yes, to capture the daring commander of the Blue Blockader will be a great thing for me to do, and I'll see that he is put out of the way," he muttered while a malignant smile distorted his handsome face.

CHAPTER VI.

UNREQUITED LOVE.

WHEN the Blue Blockader had dropped her last enemy astern, and it was open water ahead of her into port, her crew broke forth in wild cheers for their daring young commander, who had so gallantly kept his pledge to save his vessel.

The brazen muzzles of the guns in the Confederate forts gave a deep-voiced welcome as the Blue Blockader went by like a race-horse, and, following the channel unerringly with Victor Fairfax at the wheel, she swept up in front of the town, where thousands of throats burst forth in cheers, for the heavy firing had alarmed all, and it had been signaled from the fort that a blockade-runner had made a successful entrance.

As soon as he had dropped anchor Captain Fairfax ordered a boat lowered, and was rapidly rowed ashore, where he took a carriage and drove rapidly up to the headquarters of the commanding general to whom he made his report.

"And all that firing was at your devoted little vessel, Captain Fairfax?" asked General Maury.

"Yes, sir, the Blue Blockader was the recipient of far more attention than I could wish, and under ordinary circumstances I would have surrendered after being so foully dealt with, for I lost a number of my crew in killed and wounded, and my vessel was pretty well cut up; but I knew well the value of the cargo, how it was beyond price to the Government just now, and so I pushed through."

"You deserve the greatest credit, Captain Fairfax, and I only wish you had an armed vessel at sea, instead of an unarmed blockade-runner," said the general.

"I believe, sir, the Government needs a successful runner of the blockades just now more than a cruiser; but I shall discharge my cargo in the morning and lay up for repairs, which I would like at once done, sir."

"It shall be as you wish, Captain Fairfax, and I will give orders to have all ready for you; but do you return on board your vessel to-night, or will you accept a room here?"

"No, thank you, sir, for I have my mother and sister in the town, and will go there," and soon after Victor Fairfax ascended the steps of a handsome mansion upon one of the principal streets of the city.

A bright light was in the parlor, and the door opened as he turned the knob.

"The whole town is awake, though it is after midnight," he said, half-aloud, as he crossed the hall and entered the parlor.

Half-reclining upon a sofa, and seemingly lost in deep reverie, was a young girl, and no one else was in the room.

Her face, as the gas-light above fell upon it, was very beautiful, but of a dark, passionate, dangerous type of beauty, such a beauty as was Cleopatra's.

Her eyes were large, intensely black, and seemed to fairly burn with liquid fire, while her red lips were full, and half-parted displayed teeth as white as milk, small and even.

She was dressed in black, and her form was perfect in outline, and her every movement was grace.

As her eyes fell upon the tall form in the door she sprung to her feet, while a glad cry escaped her lips, and she bounded forward, throwing her arms about the neck of the young sailor, and crying, with just the shadow of an accent in her words:

"Victor, my dear, noble Victor! you have come back to me!"

He greeted her kindly, yet with a look of tenderness, while he led her to a seat and replied:

"Yes, Clotilde, I have just run into port; but where are my mother and sister?"

"They went to the plantation two days ago, and I preferred to remain; but certainly none of us expected you."

"No, I decided, as I knew these waters well, to run the blockade in and out of this port; but I am disappointed at not seeing mother and Jessie."

"Ah! I am not sufficient to make up for them?" and she spoke with a snap of jealousy in her tones.

"No one can make up for my mother and sister, Clotilde, though you are also a dear, good sister to me, as you know."

"Sister! why do you insist upon calling me so, Victor?"

"For such you are to me, Clotilde, are you not?"

"Victor, not one atom of sisterly love do I hold in my heart for you, and well you know it."

"My father left me to the guardianship of your father, and it was decided between them that I was to one day be your wife."

"You know that I always loved you, Victor, and I grew up believing you were to become my husband, some day; but then, a shadow came between us in that beautiful Yankee girl, whose father's ship is now anchored in these waters, pounding away at your home and your kindred with his brazen guns; but you love her, I be-

lieve, I feel, I know, and foe though she is now, you will not come back to me."

The young girl had sprung to her feet and paced to and fro as she spoke, her eyes on fire, her bosom heaving.

But Victor Fairfax said calmly:

"Clotilde, why will you talk thus, and excite yourself for no cause?"

"Our fathers wished that we might marry, yes, and so I believed we would until I discovered that I loved you as a sister, not as I should love the woman I wished to make my wife, and I told you so, and now say that as brother and sister alone we must remain."

"It is because you love Belle Lamar," was the almost fierce response.

"Miss Lamar is a Northern girl, Clotilde, her father is in the navy of the United States, and I serve under a flag now hostile."

"I loved her, yes, but when war was declared between her land of the North and mine of the South, all between us ended, and she is now far away, with no thought of her rebel lover," and Victor Fairfax spoke in a tone of assumed lightness.

"She is not far away, for she is visiting her aunt at The Breakers Plantation."

"What?"

"It is true, and the Federal line surrounds the place, for they have erected a fort on the shore, and her father is the commander of a vessel in the blockading squadron down the bay."

"Is this true, Clotilde?" asked the young blockade-runner captain, earnestly.

"It is true, Victor."

"Belle Lamar is at The Breakers?"

"Yes; and I believe she is a spy, Victor Fairfax, for time and again news has been carried out to the fleet in some mysterious way, and I am confident that she is playing the part of a spy, getting news from the town as best she can, and sending it to her father."

"Clotilde! don't say what is not true, for Miss Lamar is no woman to do that which is wrong," sternly said Victor Fairfax.

"Well, I believe it; and more, I shall see that she is entrapped and captured before very long, and proof against her can be found which, if a woman spy cannot be hanged, she can be imprisoned."

And the jealous Cuban maiden, for such she was, was almost frenzied by her hatred of one she deemed a successful rival.

"Clotilde, not a word that you say against Miss Lamar is true; but I will not quarrel with you, but return on board my vessel, hoping when next I see you you will be in better humor, for surely you must be ill to-night, poor child."

And he placed his hand gently upon hers.

But she sprung back and said fiercely:

"I love you, Victor Fairfax, and I have grown to womanhood with that love and find you hate me."

"But you shall never love that woman as I shall drag her down to infamy first, mark my words."

"Good-night, Clotilde; I will see you to-morrow."

And the young officer turned sadly away, while the impulsive girl threw herself upon the sofa again and burst into tears, shedding bitter, scalding tears that welled up from her heart at loving and not being loved in return.

CHAPTER VII.

IN THE TOILS.

"CLOTILDE VARONA is a dangerous woman when her feelings are deeply moved against any one, and she will surely harm Belle Lamar unless I in some way prevent it."

So said and thought Victor Fairfax on his way back to his vessel after parting with the Cuban maiden, and in deep meditation he reached the dock off which lay his vessel.

He was about to hail for a boat to be sent ashore when a negro advanced and said politely:

"I put you on board your vessel, massa, for I got my boat and is gwine out ter de cruiser I serves on."

"You are very kind, my man, and I will accept your offer."

"Yas, sah; but hain't dis Massa Victor Fairfax, de young gem'man I used ter know long ago, and who run de Blue Blockader in to-night?"

"Yes, my man; and your face seems familiar as I see it in the darkness, but I cannot recall your name."

"I am Dan'l, sah, what used ter b'long ter Miss Ellen Dorsey, sah, but she give me away to her young cousin what are in de navy, sah, and I serves him now."

"Ah, yes; I remember you now, Daniel; but, tell me, where is Mrs. Dorsey now?"

"At De Breakers, sah."

"All alone, Daniel?"

"No, sah, dere is a young lady wid her what is her niece, Missy Belle dey calls her, and I seen her when I was down dere few weeks ago."

"But the Federal line is around the place now, is it not?"

"Well, Massa Victor, de Union sagers is not far away from de mansion, but I goes dere

when I want ter, for I knows a secret path through de pines."

"Then, Daniel, you are the very man I need to help me, and if you wish to make fifty dollars in gold come on board my vessel to-morrow morning, and come prepared to carry a letter to The Breakers."

"Will you do it?"

"Deed I will, sah."

"Well, now put me on board my vessel, and come to-morrow to see me, if you can get away for a day or so."

"I can, sah, for Massa Ferdinand am away jist now."

"All right, come as I tell you, and let no one know where you are going, and I will pay you well."

The negro then rowed the young officer to the Sea Rebel, and received a golden souvenir for his trouble, which so charmed him that he was promptly on hand the next morning and was intrusted with the letter which the reader has seen that Ernest Fenton opened and read, thereby giving him the knowledge of Victor Fairfax's intention to visit The Breakers at night and enabling him to effect his capture.

When therefore Ernest Fenton appeared upon the scene it was a most startling surprise to both Victor Fairfax and Belle Lamar, for the one believed him at the bottom of the sea, after his spring overboard from the Blue Blockader, and the other little expected to see him there, at the head of United States soldiers, while both knew well the penalty of a spy and how quickly the punishment would be dealt out upon one who appeared so guilty, whatever might be his motive in coming there.

Calm, wholly unmoved, Victor Fairfax said:

"In the presence of a lady, Ernest Fenton, I will offer no resistance, though under other circumstances I would throw myself upon you and punish your treachery."

"I therefore surrender to you," and he folded his arms upon his broad breast.

"One moment, Mr. Fenton, for I would speak with you," and Belle Lamar stepped forward.

"Well, Miss Lamar?" he asked in a sneering tone.

"Leave your soldiers to guard the prisoner, while you walk apart with me, please, as I have something to say to you that will perhaps convince you that you have made a mistake."

The pilot seemed surprised at the words of the maiden, and stood in hesitancy, while the sergeant of marines accompanying him stepped to his side and said in a low tone:

"I guess this is not our man, sir, for the lady is the daughter of Captain Lamar, of the *Ranger*."

"Will you come aside with me a moment, Mr. Fenton?" again asked Belle Lamar, while Fairfax said, quickly:

"No, no, Miss Lamar; let Mr. Fenton do with me as he deems best."

"I warn him not to go too far, ere he first hears what I have to say," came in distinct tones from the maiden, and Fenton at once raised his cap and walked down the pier with her, first turning to the sergeant, and saying:

"If that man attempts to escape, sir, shoot him down as you would a dog."

When the two had advanced out of hearing of the group upon the end of the pier, Fenton halted, and said, in the same sneering tone that he had before used in addressing the maiden:

"Now, Miss Lamar, I am all attention."

"I trust you will be, for it will be to your interest to hear me."

"Once I held you in my esteem as a friend, Mr. Fenton," was the response.

"Yes, and once I held hope that you would one day become my wife; but that is past," was the bitter reply.

"We will not therefore now discuss the past, sir, but the present, and I would like to ask you if you are in our service, or the Confederate?"

"I am in the Union service, Miss Lamar."

"Your rank, please?"

"I am a pilot, Miss Lamar; but I have no actual rank, as I am on special service, and yet I will win a commission by this night's work."

"How is it that you are in command of a boat from the fleet, with a guard of marines?"

"It came to my knowledge that the gallant captain of the famous Blue Blockader would visit you at ten to-night, on the end of this pier, and so I concluded to come to the trysting-place, though uninvited, and the commodore kindly loaned me a few boys in blue, as I told him I would need them, doubtless."

"Does he know your errand?"

"To capture the blockader captain, yes, Miss Lamar."

"Does he know that he was to meet me?"

"No."

"Well, it is easy enough for you to say you were misinformed as to the gentleman being the blockader captain, and thus allow him to go free."

"Ah! Miss Lamar advising untruth and leniency toward a rebel spy."

"In this case, yes, I am willing to urge untruth, for I know that Captain Fairfax is no spy."

"His coming here as he did, in the United

States uniform, will hang him as such, at least."

"I am aware of that; but I am also aware that he did not come here as a spy, and, Mr. Fenton, knowing you as I do, I called you aside to come to some terms upon his release."

And there was a sneer in her voice now.

"You should know then, Miss Lamar, that I cannot refuse to carry out a plan so full of sweet revenge to me, as to hang my successful rival for your hand."

"Captain Fairfax is not your rival, sir, for our engagement was broken the day he handed in his resignation in the navy to join the South."

"As a Southerner he deemed it his duty to go with his people, but as a foe I could no longer remain his promised wife, and so it ended."

"Then why has he come here to-night?"

"I do not know; but for some motive which he did not explain, as you arrived before he could do so."

"And you expect me to release this man, give up my hope of revenge, simply at your word, Miss Lamar?"

"Oh, no, Pilot Fenton, for I know you too well for that—I expect to buy the prisoner's release at your hands," was the reply of Belle Lamar in a tone of utter contempt that made the man fairly cringe before her.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE PRICE SHE PAID.

It was very evident that Ernest Fenton felt keenly the cutting words of Belle Lamar, one whom he had loved from his first meeting with her, and whom he had hoped to make his wife; but, though he was cut to the quick by her assertion that she wished to purchase from him the freedom of Victor Fairfax, he quickly recovered his cynical manner and asked:

"What price was it that you intended to pay, Miss Lamar?"

"You are in need of money, I believe, or, at least, I heard that you ran through with the little fortune that your mother had and took to gambling."

"You were not misinformed, I did run through with my inheritance and my mother's legacy, and have gambled for a living," was the cool reply.

"It is as I expected, and I will therefore ask you to name your price for the liberty of Captain Fairfax."

"Do you mean to purchase him?"

"I wish to buy his freedom at your hands."

"And how will I be able to account for my prisoner to the commodore?"

"Your men evidently believe that you have made a mistake and arrested a Union officer, for Captain Fairfax is in the uniform of the Federal navy, so you can simply allow them to so continue to think of the matter."

"But the commodore?"

"I am not one to advocate falsehood, Mr. Fenton, but in this case it is a lie or a life, and you can say to the commodore that you simply failed to secure the man you sought."

"And what offer do you make for such an assertion on my part, Miss Lamar?"

"If one has aught to sell they have an idea of the value of it," she said with biting sarcasm.

"You mean for me to name the price?"

"I do."

"Suppose I say it will be a large sum?"

"You are the best judge of what your honor is worth to you."

"You are severe."

"I am just."

"Suppose I say ten thousand dollars in cash?"

"It is a large sum."

"It is for a valuable life."

"True, and I will pay it, if you will come to The Breakers to-morrow."

"My motto is cash, Miss Lamar."

"You know that I can carry no such sum with me, while furthermore you are aware that, as an heiress in my own right, I can pay you the money to-morrow, if I so pledge myself to do."

"What pledge will you give me?"

"My word," she said haughtily.

He shook his head slowly and replied:

"Miss Lamar, I know so well the frailty of my own pledges, that I trust not the word of man or woman."

"I can give no more to-night."

"Then the trade is off."

"Ah, no! here are my diamonds, which I had forgotten, and they are fully the value."

He shook his head, and she continued rapidly, as she divested herself of her jewelry:

"These earrings cost my father five thousand dollars, at Folmie & Stafford's in Saratoga Springs, where we passed last summer, while this solitaire ring is nearly as valuable."

"Then here is a cluster ring, and this one with a diamond, a ruby and an emerald, while my watch and chain will certainly make up the amount and more."

"All these are presents to me, the solitaire was my mother's, and I prize them most highly, though I can expect you to understand, and appreciate only their intrinsic value, which is

certainly over ten thousand dollars," and her biting sarcasm made him again flinch.

"I have no doubt of their value, Miss Lamar, being fully equal to the demand I make, and that you regard them as of far greater worth to you; but I do not care to accept the jewelry as pledges," he said coldly.

"In Heaven's name what can I do then, for it is too late to get any money to-night?" she cried anxiously.

"Why do you so wish to save Fairfax from the yard-arm?"

She remained silent, and he continued:

"If your engagement with the blockader captain is at an end why do you offer ten thousand dollars for his life?"

"For what he was once to me, my intended husband, whom this cruel war has separated and now made my enemy before the world."

"In other words, though a rebel and thus separating himself from you, you love him?" he said, with a sneer.

"Yes, because I love him, rebel though he is, I would save him," she said, with intense feeling.

"And permit me to say, Miss Lamar, that I love you in spite of the scorn with which you have treated me in the past."

"For the scorn a true woman must feel for a man who has brought dishonor upon his name, that man has only himself to blame," was the quick reply.

"I have been misjudged, or rather judged unheard," he said, bitterly.

"But we lose time parleying here, and I would know what you intend to do?"

"Sell you the pardon of your lover."

"At my price?"

"No, at mine."

"The ten thousand?"

"No."

"What then?"

"You asked me my price, and I named ten thousand, and you cannot pay it."

"I will give you my jewelry as security for my pledge to do so."

"No, I have set another price upon the life of Victor Fairfax."

"Name it."

"Your hand," was the low reply.

She started back as though a snake had struck at her, and a cry broke from her lips, of mingled scorn and amazement.

But he remained silently regarding her, and after a moment she said:

"Did you mean what you just now said?"

"I did."

"Your price is what, sir?"

"That you pledge yourself to become my wife to-morrow."

"God forbid!"

"Then Fairfax must hang."

"No! no! no!"

"I say yes."

"Tell me again what you wish?" she said, in a voice hardly audible.

"I wish that you should become my wife on the morrow, and so pledge yourself here to-night, by all you hold sacred, that you will."

"No! no!"

"In return I will pledge myself to come with a clergyman, have the marriage secretly performed, and then depart, promising not to come near you for two years from the date of our marriage."

She was silent for a moment, her haughty head bowed down, her hands holding the jewels, clasped tightly before her, and her form trembling.

Then she asked, in a voice that quivered in its pleading:

"Will you not be merciful?"

"No!" was the stern reply.

For full a moment she stood thus, and then she raised her head, assumed her natural manner, and said:

"Ernest Fenton, I have decided."

"Well?" he asked, eagerly.

"Come here to-morrow alone, at this pavilion, at noon, and I will be here with a clergyman, and he shall make me your wife, on condition that you vow to leave me at once, while he is with us, and never again come near me for two years."

"I do so pledge myself."

"In return, you are to now set Captain Fairfax free, and he is to go off alone in his boat, while you remain on the pier with me until he is out of sight."

"You are to let your men assume that you have made a mistake, and make your peace with the commodore as best you can."

"I agree to your terms, Miss Lamar, and shall be here at noon to-morrow; but why not let me bring a clergyman with me?"

"Because I wish to be married by one whom I know," was the stinging reply.

"Have your way, sweet lady; but now swear to me that you will keep your word."

"I do."

"That will not do, Belle Lamar, for you must repeat after me, while you raise your hand toward Heaven, the words I utter."

"I am ready."

"Then swear: 'I, Belle Lamar, before high Heaven, and by all I hold sacred, will at noon

to-morrow become the wife of Ernest Fenton, if he in return now releases the prisoner, Victor Fairfax, and thus saves him from hanging on the gallows as a spy!"

In a voice that was firm and with head erect, Belle Lamar repeated the oath after the pilot, binding her to a fate so fearful, to save her rebel sailor lover from being hanged as a spy.

"Now, sir, let us lose no more time, for I am most anxious to see Captain Fairfax out of your clutches, into which I have fallen," and she added the latter part of her words in a way that told the pilot what she thought of him.

"Very well, Miss Lamar, replace your jewelry, and we will return to the prisoner and his guards."

She thrust the jewelry into her pocket, and hastily walked by his side back to the end of the pier, while the man stepped forward, and saluting, said quickly:

"Captain, I sincerely regret that I have made a mistake in arresting you, after what I learn from Miss Lamar, and I ask your pardon, sir, hoping that it will be granted, and that the delay I have caused you will not prevent your reaching the fort in time," and he drew out his watch and glanced at it, as the sergeant lighted a match for him to see the time by.

Victor Fairfax was astounded, and knew not what to reply, but saw that Belle Lamar had in some way gained his release; but not wishing to compromise her in any way, he simply responded:

"We are all liable to mistakes, sir, and I accept your apology for the arrest."

"And, captain, will you go at once to the fort and see my aunt, telling her I refused to go to the entertainment because I was indisposed, and must still decline, even though she has sent you as my escort?" said Belle Lamar in a way that Fairfax could not fail to understand that she meant for him to depart at once.

It was a great relief to him to see the way of escaping sure death, but then he was in the dark as to what means had been used to effect his release, and he had also not been able to tell Belle why he had risked his life to come to her, and warn her against the beautiful and jealous Cuban, Clotilde Varona; but he dared not hesitate then, and so said:

"I will do as you desire, Miss Lamar, and bid you good-night," and he raised his cap, bowed low, and with a salute to the marines went down the water-stairs, sprung into his boat and rowed away in the darkness, leaving his rival standing upon the pier, chatting in apparently pleasant mood with the maiden, while the marines had returned to their boat to await his pleasure, the sergeant muttering to himself:

"All is not as pleasant sailing as it looks, and in my mind some game has been played to-night that tricks Uncle Sam out of a prisoner."

CHAPTER IX.

A STARTLING DENOUEMENT.

UNTIL the boat that carried Victor Fairfax away from death, disappeared in the darkness on the waters, Belle Lamar chatted with the pilot with forced pleasantry, raising her voice so that it should reach the ears of the marines and sailors in the boat.

Then she said in the same low tone:

"I am sorry that you have to go so soon, Mr. Fenton, but expect to see you to-morrow."

The man knew this was his dismissal, and he arose to go, deeply chagrined, for the maiden had not allowed him a chance to say a word regarding the morrow.

"Yes, I will see you to-morrow, Miss Lamar," he returned meaningly, and they started toward the stairs, when suddenly Belle Lamar stopped, glanced hastily out upon the waters, and said quickly:

"Mr. Fenton, I am going to ask you to see me as far home as the lawn, for it is a long and dismal walk back on the pier."

"Certainly, Miss Lamar."

And he offered her his arm which she took for appearance' sake, again glancing out upon the waters as they did so.

Then she became silent as they walked along, and he took the opportunity to say:

"Miss Lamar, do not, I beg of you, fret because you are forced into a marriage with me, for though I went wrong in the past, I have determined to redeem myself in the future."

"I have deeply loved you, yes, you have been my idol from our first meeting, and it is proof of my love that I force you into bonds with me, knowing that you love another."

"But, as after two years we are to live together through life, let me urge that you think of me with some respect, and watch to see if I am not doing all in my power to make myself worthy of you."

She glanced again hastily out upon the waters, and then said:

"I thank you, Mr. Fenton, for being my escort, but I will trouble you no further."

"Good-night, sir."

And she glided quickly away, leaving him standing on the pier gazing after her.

A curse arose to his lips as she disappeared in the gloom, and then he suddenly said aloud:

"Ha! why can I not do it after all?"

Hastily he walked back toward the end of the pier, and springing into his boat, he said sternly:

"Give way, men, and with all your strength!"

Turning to the marine sergeant as the boat shot out over the waters, with his hand upon the tiller he continued:

"Sergeant, when I escorted Miss Lamar to the mansion just now I saw a boat gliding along the shore, and its occupant rowed rapidly, as though fearful of being brought to, and he may be, after all, the one I seek and who caused me to make such a mistake as to arrest one of our own officers, as I did."

"Yes, sir; and you are in chase of the boat?"

"Yes, sergeant."

"I hope we will catch him, sir."

"Yes, I hope so; and it's a five-dollar gold-piece each for the men at the oars if I do."

And Ernest Fenton raised his voice so that the oarsmen heard and sent the boat flying over the waters.

"Boat, ho, sir!" suddenly called the coxswain who was in the bows on the lookout.

"Yes, I see it; and it is the one I seek, I am sure, so give way harder, lads!"

And the rowers bent still harder to their work, sending the large boat rapidly along.

But the boat ahead had now discovered them and went at a lively pace on the run, so that it became soon a matter of fact that it was gaining on them.

"Our guns will reach him, sir," said the sergeant.

"No, I do not care to fire, fearing a mistake again; but he is dropping us rapidly."

"He is, sir."

"Then we must give up the chase and return to the ship," and Ernest Fenton gave up the tiller once more to the coxswain, while he ordered the boat put away for the flag-ship.

It was a long pull, and two bells of the dog watch had struck when they ran alongside, so that the pilot would not disturb the commodore until morning, and so retired to his berth; but he reported promptly after breakfast, and the old sailor said:

"So you missed your man, sir, the officer of the deck tells me?"

"Yes, sir, and I made the mistake of arresting an officer, who had been sent from the fort, where they were having an entertainment, as an escort to bring Miss Lamar; but her explanation convinced me of my being wrong, and I made all necessary apologies."

"You were right, sir; but could you learn nothing of this blockader captain, who you were assured would be on the coast last night alone?"

"No, sir, and yet we chased a boat having a single occupant, but could not overhaul him."

"What could the Blue Blockader's captain be doing alone on this coast at night, near our fort and fleet?"

"My idea was that he was taking soundings, sir, for the purpose of running in and out the better."

"Ah! that is a plausible idea, Mr. Fenton."

"And besides, sir, his home is on this coast, I have heard, or rather he has a plantation somewhere on the shores of the bay."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, commodore, and I was going to ask you to send me ashore, that I may fully work this matter up, and then make my way into the town, for the Blue Blockader will hardly remain there many days."

"True; but you have arranged with the signal officer for all signals?"

"Yes, sir, everything is arranged."

"Well, ask the officer of the deck to set you ashore, and I hope to have a good report of you soon."

"Thank you, Commodore Hazen," and Ernest Fenton, the man playing so deep a game to further his own interests, took his departure and was rowed ashore, landing at the pier of the little fort.

From there he made his way along the beach to the pier running out from the grounds of The Breakers, and looking at his watch as he approached the pavilion saw that it was just twelve o'clock.

"I am on time," he muttered, as he stepped toward the open door.

"And so am I, sir," and Belle Lamar confronted him.

She was very pale, but grandly beautiful, and she seemed to have nerved herself for what was to come, for she was perfectly calm, and her voice had no tremor in it.

He started back at sight of her, and his face flushed slightly, as he raised his cap, and bowed.

"I am here, ready to fulfill my pledge," she said, haughtily.

"And I am also ready; but where is the clergyman who is to unite us?"

"You have forced me to marry you, Pilot Fenton, to save from the yard-arm the man I love, and I demand the right to select the minister who is to unite us—here he is."

"Uncle Ned, step forward!"

And at Belle Lamar's words the pilot started back with a cry, as an old negro man appeared in the pavilion door.

CHAPTER X.

THE APPEAL.

"THE BREAKERS" was a place of beauty, an abiding-place where one could pass away life in quiet enjoyment, away from the busy whirl of the world.

The mistress was the half-sister of Captain Leonard Lamar, who had in early life married a Southern planter and become, by his death, the possessor of a vast estate.

Her husband had been killed in a duel, and, childless as she was, the loving and devoted wife had shut herself out from the world and lived the life of a recluse.

Friends had visited her, to offer consolation, but she had seen no one for several years, making her pilgrimage each day to the grave of her husband, who was buried in the family burying ground of the estate, in a little pine grove not far from the shore.

She devoted herself to the improvement and comfort of her slaves and the care of her estate, and in time came to be known as the "Nun of The Breakers."

With a city within easy drive she never went there, and her friends of yore had at last ceased to call upon her.

Then the tocsin of war resounded through the land, and the battle between the "Stars and Stripes" and the "Bonnie Blue Flag" was begun, casting the whole country in gloom, and causing death and destruction upon all sides.

The port, near which was The Breakers Plantation, was an important one, and hence a blockading fleet was sent there and anchored in the bay, a little over a league from the home of Mrs. Dorsey.

The plantation was so situated that a point of land running out into the bay formed an island at high tide.

On this the Federal commodore had erected a fort, the better to enable him to command the entrance to the port, some leagues away, and here were encamped the marines of the fleet, with half a hundred sailors to command the heavy guns spared from the vessels.

Captain Leonard Lamar, of the Ranger, having been ordered to the fleet with his vessel, and feeling that he would be likely to remain there for some time, had his daughter come from their home on Long Island Sound, and remain with her aunt, who had, in fact, suggested that she should do so.

The presence of the fort near by placed The Breakers, as it were, within the Federal lines, and the officers were wont to visit them often, being welcomed by Mrs. Dorsey, who was not known to express a view either for or against the struggle then being waged between North and South.

Beautiful, as she has been described, brilliant and rich, it was not to be wondered at that Belle Lamar received a great deal of admiration from all, and the naval and marine officers at the fort were wont to visit at The Breakers daily, while, after nightfall many a handsome young lieutenant out in the fleet, would get leave-of-absence for a few hours and row shoreward to make a call upon the lovely maiden dwelling in the hospitable Southern home by the sea.

There were upon the plantation over a hundred slaves, dwelling in their comfortable "quarters" back among the pines, and they remained true to their mistress, staying at home even though with the Federal army near they could have deserted the place and gone their way as they chose.

The mansion was a handsome one, large, comfortably and elegantly furnished, and the house-servants, a dozen in number, were well trained, polite and ever ready to do the will of their mistress.

The most honored of all the negroes was "Uncle Ned," as he was generally called, though on Sundays he was dignified by his fellow-slaves with the title of "Parson Dorsey," taking the latter name from his master whose trusted body-servant he had been from boyhood.

In fact, Uncle Ned had stood by when his master fought the fatal duel, and he it had been who had carried the body home and told the sad tidings to the stricken wife.

Uncle Ned was the butler, and yet he held a position more like that of overseer, for there was no white manager upon the plantation other than his mistress, who left a great deal to him, knowing well his faithfulness.

Tall, well-formed, courtly in manner, Uncle Ned appeared to be a man of sixty, for his hair was white; but then he was half a score of years younger, his head having turned gray soon after the death of his master, for following the duel the noble old negro, with the memory of it in his mind, and loving Planter Dorsey as friend, comrade and master, had been taken down with brain fever and long lay hovering on the brink of the grave.

When he arose at last from his sick bed, his hair was white.

Upon the morning on which Belle Lamar had made her forced rendezvous with Ernest Fenton, in the pavilion at the end of the pier, Uncle Ned was attending to his usual duties about the mansion, when the maiden said:

"Will you come to the arbor in the grounds,

Uncle Ned, as I wish to see you upon an important matter?"

"Certainly, missy, I'll come at once," was the reply, Uncle Ned not speaking in the dialect of the ordinary negro, but in well-chosen words, while he was always dressed in the style of a "good old country gentleman"—a blue coat and brass buttons, white cravat and vest, and black pants.

Going to the arbor alone, Belle was soon after followed by Uncle Ned, who stood in respectful silence, while the maiden sat upon a rustic bench, tapping the ground with her foot and looking greatly troubled.

At last she said:

"Uncle Ned, I am greatly worried, and I wish you to help me."

"Yes, missy, I will do all in my power."

"Let me tell you the truth from the beginning, and I feel that I can trust you."

"With your life, missy."

"You know that my aunt is Southern, and her sympathies are with the South, though she says no word one way or the other?"

"Yes, missy, but she loves the land where my dear master brought her, a bride, now twenty-five years ago, and where his grave is, and by which she some time hopes to rest."

"I do not blame her, Uncle Ned, for, as a Northerner, I see matters from my standpoint, and she with Southern eyes; but she is good to me, and, as I do not remember my mother, she is as such to me."

"But, Uncle Ned, I was engaged to a Southerner, a lieutenant in our navy, and who lived in this State; but he resigned to go with the South, and our engagement ended."

"He is the one who ran the Blue Blockader through the fleet night before last."

"It was the pluckiest thing I ever saw, Missy Belle, for I stood yonder in the pavilion and saw it all."

"Yes, it was a daring deed, and he did it after his pilot—also a Southern man—betrayed to the fleet, by showing a light, the presence of the blockade-runner about to start in."

"The traitor pilot sprung into the sea, after his treachery, was picked up by my father's boat, and has won the confidence of the commodore to allow him to do certain things to capture the blockade-runners."

"This pilot, Uncle Ned, was also an officer of the navy, but resigned to save himself from dismissal, on account of his wild acts in the service, and I knew him well in those days, in fact he was a suitor for my hand."

"But he hated the one to whom I refer, as a successful rival, and that is why he tried to betray his vessel, the Blue Blockader, two nights ago."

"Arriving in port, this Southern officer in some way, discovered that I was at The Breakers, and that some danger threatened me, and so he disguised himself in the Federal uniform and came here to see me, when the traitor pilot, learning of his coming, appeared with a boat's crew and captured him."

"Ah! Missy Belle! he'll be hanged as a spy!" said Uncle Ned, feelingly.

"He would have met such fate had I not bought him off, and the price I paid, or have to pay, is a fearful one, for, Uncle Ned, I promised to marry that man, that treacherous fellow, if he would release Captain Fairfax."

"Lordy, missy, is it Master Victor Fairfax you refer to?"

"Yes, Uncle Ned."

"Missy Belle, his mother has a plantation over the bay, and one day, ten years ago, just before master was killed, we were out in a boat and got dismayed in a storm."

"Our boat was taking badly and going down, and out from the shore away over yonder, though it was blowing a driving gale, came a little craft to our help."

"In it was Master Victor Fairfax, then a midshipman in the navy and home on leave, and he saved us both, and I can never forget him, Missy Belle."

"I am glad to hear you say this, Uncle Ned."

"I don't wonder at the Blue Blockader getting in through the fleet now, Missy Belle, when I know who was in command."

"Well, Uncle Ned, to save Captain Fairfax from the yard-arm, I pledged myself to marry Ernest Fenton to-day at noon."

"Oh, Lord!"

"He pledged himself to go at once, keep the marriage a dead secret for two years from to-day, and so it was arranged that he should meet me at noon to-day on the sea pavilion."

"He will come alone, and I was to bring a clergyman with me."

"God help you, missy!"

"Uncle Ned, I do it to save Victor Fairfax, and in two years something may free me from that man."

"At least I pray God I may never be forced to acknowledge him as my husband; but, Uncle Ned?"

"Yes, Missy Belle."

"My aunt told me that you were a regularly-ordained clergyman."

"Yes, Missy Belle; master helped me to study for the ministry, and I have been the plantation preacher here for years."

"Uncle Ned, will you marry me to that man and keep my secret?"

The words were barely audible, but the old negro heard them, and replied:

"Missy, the service of the church says that you must love, honor and obey your husband, and it will be a mockery to perform such a marriage."

"Then I must seek some one else, for if I refuse all will be known."

"No, missy, I will unite you two, and pray God to disunite you in His own good time."

"You can trust me, Missy Belle."

"Thank you, Uncle Ned! just before noon go to the pavilion on the pier, and I will join you there," and with a heart aching with sorrow Belle Lamar returned to the mansion and awaited the coming of the time when she must go to the sacrifice, facing what was to her worse than death.

CHAPTER XI.

THE PLEDGE KEPT.

WHEN Pilot Fenton heard the words of Belle Lamar, that Uncle Ned would perform the ceremony, he started at first and then burst into a rude laugh.

Uncle Ned's face showed no emotion, and he stood in silence awaiting for Belle to speak.

Her face flushed at the rudeness of the pilot, and she said indignantly:

"Have you come here, sir, to insult me, and also this noble old negro, who, slave though he is, has been truer to his master, than you have been to yourself?"

"I meant no insult, Belle—"

"Miss Lamar, sir, is my name," she said haughtily.

"As you please, Miss Lamar."

"Now, sir, I will hear what you have to say in excuse, if you can give any, for your insulting manner toward Uncle Ned here and myself."

"I would say that the idea seemed so preposterous, that we should be married by an old plantation negro parson, that I could not but laugh, and still it seems most ridiculous to me."

"My honor is at stake, sir, in this forced marriage, and it does not seem ridiculous to me, but, on the contrary, a most solemn matter."

"Uncle Ned studied for the ministry for several years, and he was regularly ordained by the bishop of the diocese as a minister, so wherein can be the objection to his performing the ceremony?"

"I can see none, if you do not, under the circumstances," coldly said Ernest Fenton.

"Then Uncle Ned will unite us, as far as the ceremony goes, though, remember, we part for two years."

"I have so pledged myself."

"Beware if you break the pledge, for even a woman is to be feared at times."

"I believe you, having had some experience on that score."

"I have here a ring, sir, which I desire to use," and she took from her finger a ring.

"It is not gold."

"No, it is iron, but it will do; it was given me by an Indian chief I once met in Washington, when I was a little girl, and I think it will be fitting as a pledge of this strange ceremony between us."

"And will you disfigure your beautiful hand with that ugly band of iron?"

"Yes, for it will serve to keep you in my memory, should I be tempted to forget you during the next two years," was the cutting reply.

"As you please, Miss Lamar, but I am determined to cause you to forget the past in my life, and prove to you that I can live a life of honor and win fame."

She made no reply to this, but simply said:

"I am ready, sir."

"And I."

"Uncle Ned, will you now be good enough to perform the ceremony by the rite of the church?" said Belle Lamar, striving in vain to keep her voice from quivering.

The old negro took from a case his gold-rimmed spectacles, a present from his mistress, and then placed a prayer-book open on the table before him.

Then the pilot and Belle Lamar stood before the old negro, who read the marriage ceremony in a deep, solemn voice.

The responses of each were firmly given, and Belle Lamar became deadly pale as Uncle Ned said, in a voice that quivered:

"Those whom God hath joined together let no man put asunder!"

Releasing her hand from the grasp of the pilot, she sunk into a chair and burying her face in her hands burst into tears.

"Come, Missy Belle, don't worry, but let us go to the house," said Uncle Ned, kindly.

Instantly she sprung to her feet, her eyes flashing, her form quivering, and she cried in a voice that rung like a bell:

"Now, Ernest Fenton, go your way, and woe be unto you if you break your pledge of secrecy for the two years you have pledged yourself to let this marriage remain a dead secret."

"Go, sir, go!"

He shrunk back from her haughty manner and burning eyes, and raising his cap said, as he stood in the door of the pavilion:

"I will go, sweet wife, and I will keep my pledge, never fear; but do not hope for my death to free you from your bonds this day entered into with me, for I shall not die—oh no! but I will come, two years from to-day, to claim my bride, and I say woe be unto the man who will then stand between us!"

"Here, old man, is your fee," and he tossed a gold eagle upon the table before Uncle Ned, who seized it indignantly and threw it out of the window into the sea, while he said earnestly:

"No, master, I could not take gold for such service as I have to-day done."

The pilot laughed, bent low toward Belle, and with a kiss thrown from his finger-tips went out of the pavilion and a moment after had departed.

A dead silence fell between the maiden and Uncle Ned, for some time after the departure of Pilot Fenton, and then the former said earnestly, as she grasped his honest hand:

"Uncle Ned, I thank you for all you have done for me."

"Now go to the mansion, please, and leave me alone with my bitter thoughts."

"Do not worry, Missy Belle, for all will come right in the end, take old Ned's word for it; but don't you expose yourself too far from the mansion now, and out in the pavilion, for you cannot tell what that man may do, for he is wicked, heart, body and soul, missy."

"I believe you, Uncle Ned, and I will be careful not to place myself in his power," and Belle Lamar again buried her face in her hands, her form shaking with emotion, as the memory of her marriage swept over her in all its bitterness, while Uncle Ned walked slowly away, wending his way back to the mansion.

In the mean time Ernest Fenton had gone on his way, muttering to himself:

"Now to get the noose about the neck of Victor Fairfax, for with him out of the way I will have nothing to fear, so that Belle does not suspect me of causing his death, and, proud beauty that she is, she shall yet acknowledge me as her husband."

CHAPTER XII.

THE WARNING.

THE reader will recall that when Belle Lamar had made the pledge which set Victor Fairfax free, she had afterward asked Ernest Fenton to escort her to the mansion.

This he had willingly done, little dreaming what her real motive was for making the request.

Out upon the dark waters the maiden's keen eyes had seen the outline of a boat, and she felt that the daring young blockader captain was hovering about, hoping, after the return of the man-of-war's boat he would have an opportunity to see her.

It was to show him that there was no hope for this, to force him to at once seek safety in flight, that Belle Lamar had asked Ernest Fenton to be her escort, and when, in glancing quickly over the waters, she no longer saw the boat, and felt that her lover realized that it would be impossible to see her, and so had gone, that she dismissed the pilot, as it will be remembered that she did.

Nor had the young girl been wrong in her surmise that it was Victor Fairfax, for it was he, trying to get an opportunity to speak with her, as he had not accomplished his purpose in coming, which was to warn her not to remain longer at The Breakers, for he knew well the depth of Clotilde Varona's hatred, where love was the impelling force.

Seeing that she started for the mansion, and with the pilot, doubtless as her escort, for in the darkness he could only surmise that it was Ernest Fenton, he decided to return to the town and await another opportunity to communicate with the maiden.

The fort on the island point lay between him and the town, but this he passed far out upon the waters, as he had done on his way down, going between it and the fleet, and in case of being overhauled by a guard-boat, he had boldly put on a United States naval uniform, intending to pass as a Federal officer.

Soon as he moved along he realized that an object was coming out of the darkness astern of him.

Dropping his oars he turned his glass upon it, and said:

"It is a man-of-war's boat, and doubtless none other than that of Fenton in pursuit of me."

"But it is catching before hanging, they say, and a stern chase is a long one," and he resumed his oars once more, sending his light skiff flying along over the waters.

After awhile he muttered:

"I am dropping them rapidly, but in Heaven's name, what can have made Fenton turn renegade and traitor as he has?"

"We were never friends, and yet I never expected that he would try to betray my vessel as he did."

"It is lucky that he took the chances by springing into the sea, for I should have gone

through the fleet with him swinging at the yard-arm.

"And what could Belle have said or done to cause him to release me to-night?"

"I cannot tell, but I must know."

"It was a close call for me, though, I admit, and I owe it to her that I do not hang as a spy."

"Ah! here looms up the light-house ahead, and, as I have dropped the boat out of sight, I will hoist sail and run the balance of the way."

As he spoke he stepped a small mast, spread a leg-of-mutton sail, and, under the pressure of a four-knot breeze, went scudding along.

On a reef just ahead, which jutted out from the mainland, stood a light-house, dark, grim, silent and lightless, for during the blockade there was no reason for it to send its rays over the waters as a beacon to guide the mariner in and out.

A strange history had the old light-house, and it was said by many that it was haunted by the ghosts of those who had been its keepers in the past, as each one had died a mysterious death, two of them disappearing, and no one knew what their fate had been, while the third, still living there after the beacon was no longer needed, had been found one day lying dead in his bed, no sign of violence upon him, though with an expression of horror upon his face that showed his eyes had last rested upon some appalling sight.

Close in, almost against the light-house, ran the channel, and as he sped by Victor Fairfax gazed up at the gloomy, deserted old pile, rising fifty feet above his head in grim silence.

Passing the haunted light-house he held on his way up to the harbor, and was soon on board his vessel, which had been discharging her valuable cargo ever since her entrance, the men working day and night, as her daring young commander was anxious to have her taken to the dock for repairs, and again venture out through the blockading squadron, carrying out a load of cotton, then becoming of great value.

Entering his cabin he found innumerable invitations awaiting him, for, as a hero and the lion, he was to be wined, dined and supped day and night.

But glancing over the list, he took up one envelope marked:

"Important and personal."

"It is from Clotilde," he said, and breaking the seal he read:

"MY DEAR VICTOR:—

"I have been deeply pained that I should have given way to my feelings for you in a way that caused you to think me unwomanly and unkind."

"Come to me, now that I regret my act, and forgive and forget."

"I will expect you to breakfast in the morning at nine. Yours, CLOTILDE."

"I must go, for I would not wound Clo for the world, only she is a jealous, fiery little creature, and must not expect to win the love of one who has ever regarded her only as a brother would a sister," and saying the young sailor sought the rest he so much needed; but promptly at the breakfast hour he reached his home and Clotilde met him at the door with a warm welcome.

"I am forgiven?" she said, in a low voice.

"Yes, indeed, if there is anything to forgive; but my mother and sister have not returned yet?"

"No, but I thought I would send word over to-day, by one of the slaves, and they could come to-morrow."

"No, I will go myself to the plantation to-night."

"Can I go with you, Victor?"

"No, Clo, for I shall run over in an open boat, and cannot tell just when I will start, while I can remain but a short time, as I am anxious to get my vessel ready for sea again."

"Oh! Victor, this is a fearfully perilous life you lead, and the town is wild over your daring exploit in coming in through the fleet, while your name is upon every lip, for I heard you spoken of by every one I saw yesterday when down-town; but come in to breakfast now, and it will be such a pleasant little *tête-à-tête* meal, to have you all to myself—there, I am not going to say more," and she slipped her hand through his arm and led the way to the breakfast-room, where Victor received a hearty welcome from the old family servants who had gathered there to receive him.

Soon after breakfast he took his leave, and his muttered words showed the current of his thoughts, for they were:

"Is Clotilde sincere, or is she playing a part for some purpose of her own?"

"I cannot tell, for she is a strange girl, very strange."

Arriving on board the Sea Rebel, the young captain was busy all day with his duties, but as soon as night came he ordered his sailing-skiff gotten ready, and arming himself thoroughly, he sailed away in the darkness, telling his first officer he was going across the bay to visit his mother and sister at the plantation.

His course, however, was not across the bay, but down the coast, past the deserted light-house, by Fort Lookout, and thence directly to the pier of The Breakers Plantation.

Arriving there he fastened his boat beneath

the pier, so that it would be hidden, and wended his way toward the mansion.

It was after nine o'clock some time, but the lights burned in the parlor, and he stood in the shadow of the shrubbery and gazed within.

He saw there Mrs. Dorsey, seated in an easy-chair near the table, reading, and Belle Lamar was standing by the open window gazing out across the waters to where the lights of the blockading squadron were visible.

"Belle!"

He called the name in a tone that he knew would reach her ears, and he saw by her start that she heard it.

Then he stepped out from the foliage, and beheld her wave her hand and disappear from the window.

A moment after she came out upon the piazza, a wrap about her shoulders, and walked rapidly down toward the shore.

Quickly he followed her, and they met at the pier.

"Oh, Victor! how reckless you are to again come here!" she cried.

"I came, Miss Lamar, to say why I before visited you, and to thank you for my life, to thank you that I did not die upon the gallows."

"I did but my duty, Captain Fairfax; but I pray you do not remain here a moment longer, for your life is in danger."

"May I ask how it was that you caused Ernest Fenton to release me?"

"I can only say that he granted my request and allowed you to go free; but now please depart, for I am so fearful you may be discovered."

"One word; I came to warn you not to remain here, for though my suspicions may be unjust, still I fear that they may not be, and I beg you to return to your Northern home on the Hudson, or at least, not doing so, to stay with your father upon his vessel, where you will be safe."

"But what are your suspicions, Captain Fairfax?"

"That you may be arrested as a spy."

She started and answered:

"Is it said that I am?"

"I have not heard so, but I fear such a charge may be brought against you, and I beg you to seek safety by leaving here."

"I do not fear danger such as you suggest, Captain Fairfax— Oh, see there!"

As she spoke a form suddenly stepped from the shadow of a live-oak tree and advanced toward where they stood, on the shore end of the pier.

"Captain Fairfax, you are my prisoner," came the stern words, and the hand that was extended held a revolver.

"Never!" and Victor Fairfax dropped his hand upon his own weapon, when there came a flash and report, and a bullet whizzed by his head.

But instantly he, too, pulled trigger and the man dropped in his tracks.

"Quick, Belle! Fly to the mansion, for the shots will alarm the guards and the fort."

"But you, Victor, you—"

"Do not mind me, for my boat is at the pier-end and I can escape, so fly—bark! there is the alarm sounding at the fort! Go, Belle, or I shall remain here and bide the result."

She saw that he meant what he said, and she grasped his hand in farewell and then bounded away toward the mansion where alarmed servants were hastening to and fro.

A moment he gazed after her, and turning, sped along the pier with the speed of a deer.

He reached his boat, sprung in, and was soon rowing rapidly out over the dark waters, while the lights were flashing along the shore, showing that squads were patrolling the beach to discover the cause of the shots fired.

"Now I will head across the bay for The Retreat, and I'll be fortunate if I run the gantlet of the fleet," he said, as he stepped his mast and raised the little sail.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE HAUNTED LIGHT-HOUSE.

THE sun had risen above the horizon, when the stanch little sail-boat, in which sat Victor Fairfax at the tiller, headed in toward the shore of the bay, where he had gone to visit his mother and sister at The Retreat Plantation.

It was a lovely shore, rising as it retreated from the water, and upon the ridge stood the mansion, a most comfortable-looking abode, with ornamental grounds surrounding it, broad acres stretching away in the rear, and commanding a superb view of the bay, with the fleet of blockading vessels leagues away looking like mere boats upon the waters.

A fish-hook-shaped pier jutted out from the land, and into the curve of this the young blockader captain ran his boat, where it found an anchorage, the heavy lines of spiles serving as a break water.

His boat had been seen by the negro butler, when some distance off, and taking a spy-glass from its brackets upon the piazza he had recognized his young master, and instantly the mother and sister had been aroused to welcome the wanderer, while scores of slaves also assembled upon the pier to greet him.

Mrs. Fairfax was a woman whose face was that of one well-born, and her manner, though reserved, was very winning.

Her daughter, Beulah, was very much like her mother, and her face was full of sunshine and beauty, one of those bright, lovely countenances that to see is to love.

Mother and daughter hastened down, as soon as dressed, to greet the son and brother, and met him as he came up the hill surrounded by a score of servants, whose welcome of him showed how much he was thought of by the negroes on the plantation.

As they walked toward the mansion Victor told his mother and sister how he had been ordered by the Confederate Government to purchase a fleet vessel and devote her services alone to running in much-needed hospital stores, arms and ammunition, and when he told them that it had been his vessel coming in that had caused the cannonading three nights before, Mrs. Fairfax turned pale and said:

"Oh, my son! had we dreamed that you were exposed to that fearful danger, intense indeed would have been our suspense and sorrow, for the guns shook our windows and we prayed earnestly for those exposed to the terrible fire; but you will remain some time in port, I hope, now that you are here?"

"No, mother, I hope to get out again at once, for the Government sadly needs stores of all kinds, and you know I am on special duty, the other blockade-runners being owned by outsiders, who are most anxious to make fortunes, and bring those things only as freight that pay the largest prices; but when do you return to town?"

"It will be some time yet, for we are preparing the place against its being destroyed, getting our things packed and sent over to the town, where we can store them without danger; but is not that a small steamer putting in toward our wharf?" and Mrs. Fairfax pointed out upon the waters.

"Yes, mother, it is a Government launch and is coming here—doubtless with orders for me, for I told Lieutenant Howard to send for me if I was needed."

"Ah, Victor, my poor boy, war is a fearful thing indeed; but it is my duty to yield you up for your country, and I will utter no word of complaint, but say go and may God protect you."

"Yes, brother, and we will be very proud of you, I know, before this cruel war ends, for already you are winning deserved fame," said Beulah Fairfax, in a light-hearted way, turning her head, however, to dash away the tears that had risen to her beautiful eyes.

The launch had now run alongside of the pier, and soon after a midshipman was seen advancing up the hill-path toward the mansion.

"It is Ralph Lucas, one of my middies," said Victor Fairfax, and he arose to meet the handsome young midshipman as he ascended the steps, saluting politely as he did so.

"Well, Midshipman Lucas, you have made me an early call, I see; but you're welcome, and just in time for an old-fashioned plantation breakfast."

"Mother, permit me to present Midshipman Lucas, one of my most gallant young officers, for I must tell you that I am allowed regular officers by the Government."

"My sister Beulah, Mr. Lucas."

The young middy blushed as he met Beulah's beautiful eyes, bowed low, and said:

"Captain Fairfax, I bring you important dispatches, sir," and the midshipman handed over an official-looking document, which the young captain hastily broke the seal of, glanced over and said:

"Mother, this order necessitates my going at once to sea again, as it is necessary that the Government receives a certain cargo, now at Nassau in a vessel that has been seriously disabled."

"I shall start to-night without awaiting the repairs on the Sea Rebel, for her machinery and running gear are all right, so after breakfast we must depart at once for town."

It was sad news for the fond mother and sister, but their love for the brave sailor was not allowed to stand against his duty, and an hour after receiving his orders farewells were said, and Victor Fairfax was on his way in the launch back to the town.

Arriving there he set all hands to work getting all ship-shape for the night's work, which no one doubted would be a desperate undertaking, as, having failed to capture the Blue Blockader in the run in, the fleet would be on the *qui vive* to do so on the way out.

Just after dark Victor Fairfax sprung into a carriage and was driven rapidly to his house, to bid farewell to Clotilde Varona; but to his surprise he learned that she was not at home, and had not been during the day.

But he had no time to look her up, or comment upon this strange circumstance, accepting the suggestion of the negro butler that she had ridden out to visit some friends who dwelt out of town, and where she was often wont to go.

Returning on board the order was given to cast off the lines, lights were put out, the wheels

began to turn, and the beautiful Blue Blockader started on her way to the sea, her captain at the wheel, for no pilot could be obtained on such short notice; but then, reared as he had been on the shores of the bay, no one better knew those waters than did Victor Fairfax.

Swiftly the rakish-looking craft went on her way, following the winding channel until she reached the deserted light-house, beyond which was open water.

Far off the twinkling lights of the blockading fleet were visible and, directly beneath the light-house, and so close that one with an oar could have touched it almost from the quarter-deck, the Blue Blockader paused as though to catch breath for the coming struggle.

With his glass to his eye Victor Fairfax noted the different lights of the blockading vessels, and then said to the group of officers about him:

"We will not be expected out so soon and thus have a great advantage.

"I shall take the inshore passage and run the gantlet of the fort, for if it does not cripple us I shall not fear the fleet, which we can rapidly drop astern, as they will not see us, doubtless, until the fort opens.

"Now, every man to his post—Ha! our presence is betrayed to the fleet by some traitor in yonder light-house!"

As Captain Fairfax spoke a light of livid blue burned above their heads, having been cast over from the top of the haunted light-house, and the Blue Blockader was revealed as though beneath a noonday sun.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE DESERTER.

THE man who had appeared so unexpectedly upon the scene, demanding the surrender of Victor Fairfax as he stood at the shore-end of the pier with Belle Lamar, had come from the shadow of a live oak-tree not far distant.

He had seen from a distance the form of the blockader captain and the maiden, and hastening to the spot had alone attempted the perilous duty of making him prisoner.

But his rashness had well-nigh cost him his life, for he fell like one shot dead.

Still he was not seriously hurt, the bullet from the blockader captain's pistol having merely cut the flesh over his temple, stunning him for a moment only.

He arose with an effort, however, staggered slightly and gazed about him.

Fairfax had gone, and Belle Lamar had also disappeared.

Alarmed by the shots, the long-roll was sounding in the fort, and all was on the alert along the line of pickets, while the lights moving about the mansion showed that the inmates were also aroused.

"I failed in my effort, and I do not care to be known now to the military, so I will depart, for especially do I wish Belle Lamar not to know who I am.

"So she has met that fellow, Fairfax, after all, and is my wife, too.

"And he has again risked his life to come here.

"I must see to this—Ah! soldiers are coming this way, for I hear their tread.

"I will leave by the water, taking one of the plantation boats."

So saying, Ernest Fenton walked briskly away down the pier to the end, and then springing into a small sailboat, hoisted the sail and moved away.

He held out from the land toward the fleet, feeling that he would not be seen, and then kept on up the bay toward the town, having evidently decided upon some course to pursue.

He knew the waters well, having, as has been stated, been on a coast-surveying vessel there and soon drew near the light-house, which arose dark and silent before him.

"Ah! here is my very abode, for what better place could I wish than this, as no one will come here?"

And so saying, he took in sail, and seizing the oars, moved slowly in toward the light-house.

In the rear was a small basin for the keeper's boat, formed by a breakwater, and here Fenton moored his skiff and sprung out upon the pier.

Not a sound did he hear, except the wash of the waves against the bulkhead; but he listened attentively for a few moments and then approached the door.

It was locked, but the key was there, and he turned it and opened the massive door.

"No one is within, certainly, or the key would have been on the inner side," he muttered.

Taking a match from his safe he looked about him by its light and saw a large room that had evidently been used as a storehouse, for there were oars, ropes, anchors, nets and various other articles, with piles of wood in one corner.

Ascending a pair of narrow stairs, still guided by his burning matches, he came to a second floor.

This was a kitchen and sitting-room combined, for there was a stove, table, chairs and a bed therein.

From it the stairs led to a floor above, and he had gotten but half-way up when his match went out.

To his surprise he saw above him a light.

Some one was certainly there, and he went cautiously up the stairs.

He knew that this was the top floor, or room, and smaller than the others, as the light-house was large at its base and small at the top.

Cautiously he peeped up into the room, and beheld a lantern burning on a table, while upon the floor on a mattress lay a human form.

Upon the table also were a pair of pistols and a cutlass.

To glide across the room and seize these was but the work of an instant for Ernest Fenton, and then he stood over the sleeper.

He saw that he was dressed as a sailor, and slept with the uneasy manner of one who had fear in his heart.

"Shipmate, awake!"

The man half sprang to his feet to find the pilot standing over him, a revolver in one hand, a cutlass in the other.

"Lost! I am lost!" he groaned, as he saw that he was at the mercy of the intruder.

"Who are you, sir?" asked Fenton, sternly.

"I am a deserter, sir; I suppose there is no good denying it," was the resigned answer.

"A rebel?"

"No, sir, I am a sailor in the Navy of the United States, but my home is yonder in the town, and I deserted to see my poor old mother; but I found that she had been over a year in the graveyard, and I was going to be arrested I heard, so I fled from the port, yet dared not go back to the fleet, so swam out here two nights ago."

"You tell a plausible story, my man; but how did you get into this light-house?"

"The rear window on the ground floor was open, so I entered through that, sir, leaving the door locked as I found it."

"And how long have you been here?"

"Three days, sir."

Ernest Fenton was silent a moment, as though lost in deep thought; but then he said:

"My man, who I am it matters not, nor whether I am Federal or Confederate.

"But you can serve me, and well, if you are so inclined, and I will see that you do not suffer from either side, if you do your duty well."

"I am more than willing, sir."

"There is no danger of any one coming here, though two of us have done so, and I wish you to remain here."

"Yes, sir."

"Have you any food?"

"I found some crackers here, sir, and I catch fish at night."

"Very well, I will get you to row me across to the main shore and there leave me, you returning here in my boat, for I suppose you swam out here as I saw no skiff in the basin?"

"Yes, sir, I did."

"Now I will get provisions for you, and some other things I wish you to make sure of, and I will be back early to-morrow night, and we will arrange our plans for the future.

"What is your name?"

"Call me Coxswain, sir, for I have not done right by the name my father left me," was the evasive answer.

The pilot saw that the self-accused deserter was a man of striking presence, under thirty years of age, possessing a large, athletic form, and the face of one who would do and dare much.

He said, after having made his decision regarding the man:

"Well, Coxswain, you can call me Captain, and the names are sufficient for us to know each other by, at least for the present.

"Now come down and put me ashore, and let me feel that I can trust you, as you can me, for if matters go right as I am planning them, I can enrich us both, and gold is just what all of us want in this world."

"I'll be here, sir, when you return, and you can depend upon me to help you," was the reply.

Descending to the lower floor, the two now left the light-house, and entered the boat in which Ernest Fenton had come to the place.

It was an eighth of a mile to the mainland, and they landed at a point on which was a small pine thicket.

"I will come here to-morrow night, Coxswain, and when you see a red light displayed here among the pines, come ashore for me."

"Yes, sir."

And having landed the pilot, the deserter put back in his boat for the light-house, while Ernest Fenton went on his way on foot toward the town, distant several miles.

CHAPTER XV.

THE RESCUE.

AT the time of which I write there was but the show of a picket-line around the town where the scene of my story is laid, for no attack was expected from the water, the forts keeping the Federal fleet at bay along with the obstructions placed in the channel at certain points.

Ernest Fenton therefore knew that he would have little difficulty getting into the town, and

yet he preferred to go in by daylight, and so, upon reaching a point not far distant from the city, he sat down in the shelter of some pines to rest and await the coming of dawn.

He had lost much rest of late and was very tired, so he arranged himself in as comfortable a position as possible and dropped into sound slumber.

So utterly exhausted was he that the dawn broke, the sun arose, and yet he slept on.

At last he awoke with a start, for voices broke on his ear.

His position was well shielded from the view of the highway, only a few paces distant, and he beheld through the shelter of the thicket two men standing in the shelter of the trees and talking together.

He saw that they were in the Confederate uniform, and their muskets leaned against a tree near by them.

Recalling that he had slept for hours and was in a dangerous vicinity, Ernest Fenton at once was on the alert and, listening attentively, heard the words of the two men.

One was saying:

"I don't believe she will come, Roe."

"I say yes; for I saw her myself last night, told her what to do, and she promised."

"Well, if she brings the money we are all right and can go back; but if she don't, we've got to desert and go over to the Federals down at the fort on the bay."

"You are right, for our having tapped the paymaster's chest will soon be discovered and traced to us, and that we lost the money in gambling will also be known, and then look out."

"Yes; we must get the money from the girl, and I have an idea we can make more out of her."

"As how?"

"Well, you see she believes she is to bring gold to help her brother, as Fairfax is supposed to be, for she is only an adopted sister, and really he is her lover."

"I told her that he needed five hundred in gold, to save him from a certain trouble, and she was to bring it here this morning, and she will do it, for Captain Fairfax having gone over to his plantation last night, will carry out the idea, if she should send to the vessel, suspecting us."

"True."

"But my idea is that we can capture her, and you hold her here a prisoner, while I go back to town and get more money on an order she will doubtless be glad to send to get her freedom."

"When I return we can carry her with us as far as the vicinity of the fort, and then while we go into the Union lines as deserters, she can go free."

"A good idea, and I only hope it will work."

"It must."

"How much must we demand of her?"

"A thousand dollars, and then she will doubtless have on her jewels, which, with the five hundred she brings, will put us in good luck."

"You are right; but there comes some one now."

"Yes, it is the girl, and she is coming at a gallop."

"I only hope she has no escort following her."

"If she has, we are done for."

"She is alone, and now we must act," said one, after a pause, and a few moments after Ernest Fenton heard the clatter of hoofs, and then he saw a horsewoman draw rein, as the men stepped out of the pine thicket.

"Well, sir, I have kept my word, and am here to pay the ransom you demand for my brother, whom you said you held prisoner," said Clotilde Varona, sharply, for she it was.

"Yes, miss, I told you last night, when I went to see you, that Captain Fairfax had been captured in his boat, as he was going to the plantation to see his mother, and it would take five hundred dollars in gold to get him free."

"Have you the money?"

"I have; where is Captain Fairfax?"

"Back in the woods, miss, so if you will dismount we will hitch your horse here and lead you to him."

"I shall not dismount, for there is something strange in all this."

"Bring Captain Fairfax here and you shall have the money," was the baughty reply.

"Roe, we must act," said one of the men, and both seized the bridle-rein of the horse, and grasped the maiden firmly.

But there came a sharp report from the thicket and one of the men dropped dead in his tracks, while the other, releasing his hold on the bridle-rein, with a cry of terror bounded away, just as Ernest Fenton appeared from the thicket's shelter.

Clotilde Varona was amazed, and alarmed also, and sat upon her horse gazing at the dead man lying near, and at the pilot who so suddenly appeared before her.

"Do not be alarmed, Miss Varona, for I am your friend, and not a foe," he said politely, raising his cap as he advanced.

"What does all this mean, sir, I pray you tell me?" said the young girl.

"I was on my way to the town and halted yonder in the thicket to rest, when this dead

man and his comrade who has fled, came here and talked over their plot against you.

"They little dreamed that any one was near, and I heard one say how he had told you that Captain Fairfax, your adopted brother I believe, was a prisoner, and his release could be gained by your bringing five hundred dollars in gold to this place this morning.

"Then they planned to seize you, and make you give an order for a large sum to gain your freedom, when they would rob you of your jewels and desert to the Union lines.

"Hearing their plot I waited for them to act and so came to your rescue."

"Oh, sir! from what have you not saved me?" cried Clotilde, the tears coming into her beautiful eyes, while she seized his hand and warmly pressed it.

"I am glad to have been of service to you, Miss Varona."

"You know me then?"

"I have heard of Miss Clotilde Varona as the adopted sister of Captain Victor Fairfax."

"I am; but Captain Fairfax is not then in trouble and a prisoner?"

"No, Miss Varona."

"Oh! those wicked men! but why are you here, sir?"

"As I said, I was on my way to the town."

"You are a Confederate soldier, sir?" and Clotilde glanced at his attire, which was simply a gray uniform, with cap.

"I am a sailor, Miss Varona."

"How can I repay you, sir, for what you have done for me, for my jewels I wear. I would not part with them for any sum, as they were left me by my dead mother."

"If you really wish to serve me in return for what I have done, Miss Varona, kindly do not refer to this attack upon you by these men, and the death of this one."

"Return to the city after a gallop, and do not speak of having met with an adventure, or having seen one."

"This is a strange request, sir, certainly."

"True, and yet I have good reasons for making it, and sincerely hope you will do as I ask."

"I will, as I owe so much to you, sir."

"I will ride on to the house of a friend, and in no way refer to what has happened, only I wish you would tell me just who you are."

"Some day I may do so."

"Again I thank you, sir. Good-morning."

And Clotilde Varona rode rapidly away from the scene of her strange adventure, while the pilot, making a *détour* from the spot and leaving the dead man lying where he had fallen, went once more toward the town, which he entered by an unfrequented road, and gained a secluded hotel, where he took up his quarters with the landlord, who had known him well in the past, and in fact owed him certain obligations which he had never repaid and which were of such a nature that he turned pale when the pilot entered his office and quietly laid his hand upon his shoulder with the remark:

"Now, Bedloe, I have come to you, as I told you I some day would."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE PLOTTERS.

THE room which Landlord Bedloe showed his unwelcome guest to was the best in the house and in a secluded wing of the building overlooking the garden.

"Sit down, Ned Bedloe, for I wish to have a talk with you," said the pilot, quietly.

And the man obeyed with the air of one forced to comply.

"Do not think, Bedloe, that I am here as a pauper guest, for I am not, though if I was it would be your duty to take care of me; but I have ample funds, and I do not intend to draw upon your purse for a dollar, so do please take off that disconsolate look from your face."

The landlord smiled, and the smile showed that he was pleased to feel that he was not called upon to hand out money.

"These are hard times, Mr. Fenton, very hard times; but you know I am ever ready to do for you," he said.

"And you should be, for I kept you out of prison for life by sending an innocent man there in your place, so you owe me a life-long debt, Bedloe."

"But we will not discuss that matter, as I have something more important to talk about."

"The fact is, Ned, I am in a little trouble, and I wish your aid."

"I entered the Confederate service as a pilot, joined the blockade-runner *Sea Rebel*, at Nassau, and—"

"You refer to the *Blue Blockader*?"

"Yes."

"She made a wonderful run in."

"She did."

"I understood that her young captain, Victor Fairfax, brought her in."

"So he did; but was nothing said about the pilot?"

"Not a word that I heard."

"Then he has kept that dark; but you see, Ned, I was suspected of treachery, and so would be hanged if caught."

"That is bad."

"Yes, I am in as bad a scrape as you are, for if it was known that you killed that gambler, and not the one tried on circumstantial evidence and now in prison, you would hang too."

"Don't refer to that, Mr. Fenton, I beg of you," groaned the man.

"I only do so to remind you that we are both in the same boat, and what you can do for me I wish you to do willingly."

"I will do so."

"Very well, Bedloe; now tell me what you think of this war?"

"I am an Englishman, as you know, Mr. Fenton, and care little for the result."

"So I thought, and it will not go against your grain to help me a little?"

"If it is safe to do so."

"Oh, it is safe enough, for all I wish you to find out is just when blockade-runners intend to sail, and are expected in, and post me."

"Then I need certain disguises, which you can get for me, and I also wish some provisions for a man I have on duty some distance from here, and who cannot come to town to buy them for himself."

"Here is money for you, and I have plenty more, so do not fear I shall draw on you."

"You have only to command me, Mr. Fenton, for all you need."

"You have a farm in the country, I believe?"

"Yes, sir."

"You go there occasionally?"

"Yes."

"Well, just before dark to-night hitch up your team and drive me out of town, taking the box of provisions with you, and also some other things which I will give you a list of and wish you to purchase for me."

"I will do so, Mr. Fenton," was the response, in the same resigned way.

"Now order me my breakfast here, Bedloe, and by that time I will have the list ready for you, and also tell you just what I wish you to do; but remember, only your most trusted servant must know that you have a guest here in this room."

"I understand, sir," was the reply of the landlord as he left the room; but once out of the door, he turned and shook his clinched fist at the man who, holding his secret, was his master, and said through his shut teeth:

"Some day, Ernest Fenton, I will end this misery and free myself of the bonds of fear you hold me with."

Half an hour after he returned, accompanied by a negro bearing a tray on which was a tempting breakfast, and after the servant had departed, Ernest Fenton said:

"Here is the list, Bedloe, and I shall expect to see you again within a few hours."

"I'll soon return, sir."

"Don't forget about the blockade-runners, and especially find out when the *Blue Blockader* expects to sail."

"I will do so without fail," and the landlord again left his guest alone.

But soon after noon he returned and said:

"I have your disguise ready for you, Mr. Fenton."

"And the ammunition and blue-lights?"

"All are here, sir."

"Good! and the provisions?"

"Will be ready on time, sir."

"Now about the blockade-runners?"

"The *Blue Blockader* sails to-night."

"What?" and Ernest Fenton sprang to his feet.

"It is true."

"Why she has hardly gotten her cargo out!"

"Still she goes to-night, for some special orders came, I found out, and Captain Fairfax was sent for over to the plantation, where he had gone to see his mother, and the *Blue Blockader* is getting ready to run out to-night."

"Then I have no time to lose."

"Are you going on board of her, Mr. Fenton?"

"Not I; but I wish to start earlier out into the country, so have your team ready an hour before sunset."

"Yes, sir."

"Now is there any news about town?"

"A dead Confederate soldier was found out on the hills this morning by a party of cavalry, and there were two guns standing against a tree near by."

"That is of no importance to me."

"No, sir; but is not that a wound upon your head?"

"Yes, the cut of a bullet that gave me a close call; but it is nothing."

"No, only it looks bad."

"Well, I am not going on looks now, Bedloe; but now go and get all ready for our start to the country, for we must go early."

"I will send my stableman with you, Mr. Fenton."

"No, you will go yourself, Bedloe, for I trust no man but one on whom I have a hold that will keep him from betraying me."

Bedloe winced, but made no reply, and an hour after the two drove away from the hotel, Ernest Fenton dressed in the jeans suit of a countryman, and wearing a wig of iron-gray hair.

The pilot told the landlord which road he

wished to take, and a drive of some miles brought them, just at dark, to a point not very far from the thicket near the light-house.

"Here I will leave you, Bedloe; but keep my room for me, as I may drop in on you at any moment, night or day, and don't forget to find out all the information you can regarding the blockade-runners going out and coming in."

So saying he took from the wagon the large box he had brought along, threw it upon his shoulder and moved off toward the thicket, leaving the Englishman to drive on to his farm, or back to the town as he pleased, and still swearing that some day he would cease to live in dread of Ernest Fenton.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE OUTWARD RUN.

WHEN Ernest Fenton reached the edge of the little pine thicket from whence a view could be obtained of the haunted light-house, rising like a grim silent sentinel out upon the waters, he put down the heavy box he carried and took from his pocket a lantern shut in with red glass.

This he lighted, and placing it in the ridge of the pines sat down and awaited the result.

It was a desolate, lonely spot, and he could not but feel the impress of its solitude, for he began to pace nervously to and fro.

Even a man with a clear conscience would have felt the appalling loneliness of the place.

The waves fell with a moan upon the beach, the wind sighed a dirge through the pines, and now and then a night-bird broke the spell of utter desolation from humanity.

"Can the man have doubted me and fled?" murmured Ernest Fenton, after he had waited some little time.

"If he has, then it is a sure thing that the *Blue Blockader* gets to sea to-night, for she will be right upon the fleet in this darkness before they see her, and, not expecting her out so soon, she will go by them like a flash ere they can fire, I fear."

Again he paced to and fro, and then stopping once more peered up toward the distant town.

A glance at the skies told where it lay, but all was quiet in that direction.

Then he again gazed searchingly toward the light-house and his eyes detected a dark spot upon the waters.

"It is the boat, and he has been cautious enough to come with muffled oars," he muttered.

And taking up the box and his red lantern he went down to the water's edge.

"Ho, Coxswain!"

"Ay, ay, Captain!"

The response was a great relief to the pilot, and he placed the box in the boat as it ran half-way out upon the sands.

Instantly he was seized in a grip of iron, while the Coxswain said sternly:

"And who are you, sir?"

"Ho Coxswain, unhand me, for it is all right, and I am in disguise," cried the pilot, adding:

"You have an iron grip on you, Coxswain."

"Pardon me, Captain, but I thought I had been entrapped, as, dark though it is, I saw that your beard was gone, and you looked little like the one I parted with last night."

"Yes, I disguised myself, as I am known to some in the town; but come, we must hasten back to the light-house, as there is work for us to do."

"I am ready, sir," was the response, and the boat was shoved off, the Coxswain taking the oars and pulling back rapidly to the light-house.

Arriving there the box was taken out, and the provisions it contained were put in a cupboard for the use of the lone dweller in the old light-house, while several other packages were taken up to the top floor.

"Eat something, Coxswain, for I know you must need substantial food, and then come up to the camp, and I will show you what I intend to do," said Ernest Fenton, and lighting another lantern he made his way up-stairs.

In a short while he was followed by the deserter, who felt much better after his good square meal, and he saw that the pilot had shaded the rays of his lamp so that the light could not be seen, and sat upon the top, crouching behind the balustrade that ran around the light-house, so that he could walk all around the lamp, which was elevated several feet above the brickwork.

Ernest Fenton also had a glass to his eyes, and he was gazing in the direction of the town.

"Are you expecting a vessel, sir?"

"Yes; sit down so that a keen eye through a glass will not see you, and then keep your eyes in yonder direction, for the *Blue Blockader* is to run out to-night."

"I do not think she will get out, sir, for you see by the lights the fleet is anchored in the channelway, and well scattered."

"True, but the *Blue Blockader* draws very little, and with this tide may be able to take the channel inshore, which you see is not guarded by the fleet, but only by the fort."

"True, sir; but I think that I see something yonder on the waters, if you will turn your glass upon it."

"You have good eyes, Coxswain, for it is the Blue Blockader," was the quick reply.

"If we could only signal the fleet, sir, after she passes, we could put them on their guard."

"Yes, and I intend to do more than that."

"Then you are an officer of the fleet, sir?" anxiously said the deserter.

"Do not be alarmed, Coxswain, for I will not let harm befall you; but I am an officer of the fleet, and on secret service."

"Now hand me that blue-light, and I'll set it on fire and throw it over just when the Sea Rebel passes near this light-house."

"That will reveal her to the fleet, sir, and she will run back to the town, knowing it will be impossible for her to break through the blockade."

"You do not know the man who commands her, Coxswain, for he will not put back, but go on."

"It will be madness to do so."

"Not if he can take the inshore channel, for the fort can do him little damage, and he'll be in the offing and make it a stern chase of him for the fleet, once he has rounded the Battery on shore."

"He is slackening up, sir, as he nears the light-house."

"God grant he does not take in his head to land here, for he would hang me as sure as he found me," anxiously said the pilot.

"And I'd share the same fate, sir; but see, she has stopped, and almost beneath us."

Ernest Fenton did see, and he felt anything but comfortable, for the heat from the smoke-stack came in to their faces, so near beneath them was the Blue Blockader.

An instant she lay quiet upon the waters, and the suspense to the watchers in the top of the light-house was terrible; but then she began to move forward, and at that moment did Ernest Fenton ignite the blue-light and hurl it from him, the Coxswain following suit with another a moment after.

The old light-house stood out in the weird glare like some huge giant of the deep.

The waters were as bright as though the sun shone down upon them, and the Blue Blockader, shooting away on her perilous course, was revealed in bold relief.

And a beautiful vessel it was, rakish in build from stem to stern, lying low upon the waters, with her masts and spars as trim as a yacht, and every man on board at his post ready to die if need be.

At her stern floated the "bonnie blue flag," its folds fluttering in the wind, and carrying her colors flying, though the night was inky black.

"Great God! why did I not bring a rifle, for I could kill that man as he stands there at the wheel!" cried Ernest Fenton, as he saw that Victor Fairfax was plainly revealed before him under the glare of the burning blue-lights.

"He intends to attempt the run, sir, and it would be wrong to shoot down so brave a man," cried the Coxswain, as the Blue Blockader sped on her way, now once more, with sky, waters and light-house wrapped in inky blackness.

"Did you not see a vessel in tow of the Blockader?" cried the pilot.

"Now you speak of it, sir, I did; it was a small craft."

"Yes, what can it mean?"

"I cannot tell, sir; but can you see her, sir, for my eyes are blinded yet from the glare of the lights?"

"Yes, yonder she goes, and as though in sheer defiance she has set her lights, and heads directly for the channel in which the fleet is anchored."

"Then he will be surely taken, sir, or sunk."

"I hope so, and yet I doubt it, for Victor Fairfax will go where no other man dare venture," was the fierce response of Ernest Fenton, as he sat glaring after the fast-receding lights of the Blue Blockader, which was boldly heading for the fleet of cruisers, from whose decks rockets of warning were being sent up.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE FOIL.

It was with the deepest interest that Ernest Fenton and the deserter watched the outgoing blockade-runner.

Why the lights had been boldly set neither one of the two could understand, for certainly, without them, the Blue Blockader would not have been seen until she got very close upon the fleet, the night being so dark that objects upon the water, and even a large vessel, would not be visible a quarter of a mile distant.

"I am surprised at his daring, for it is even greater than I expected in Victor Fairfax, to set these lights," said Ernest Fenton, with amazement, and he and the deserter watched the lights moving rapidly toward the fleet, for the vessel could no longer be seen.

"The fleet are wide awake, sir, and he'll never get through," answered the Coxswain.

"Yes, we put them on their guard, that is certain, and each vessel is now ready for the Blockader; but they were the other night, and yet Fairfax got through."

"He was in their midst before he was seen, sir, and so had not the odds he will have to-

night, when he has to advance right toward them under fire."

"True, and I cannot believe after all he will go through, and think he sets his lights as a mere bravado, intending to put about and run back."

"There opens the flagship, sir," and the Coxswain spoke as a gun flashed far off upon the waters, and momentarily revealed the large vessel of the commodore, which was the one nearest inshore, and the first cruiser the Blue Blockader must meet.

"Yes, and there goes another gun, so they intend to make it hot for Fairfax this night, and he can never get through. See! that shot came almost to the light-house," and the iron messenger plunged into the sea only a cable's length away.

"Yes, sir, but we are too high up here to be hit, even if a shot struck the light-house, which I doubt," returned the Coxswain.

"Well, the flagship has begun to open lively now, and see, others of the fleet do the same, so the Blue Blockader is getting it pretty hot, Coxswain."

"Yes, sir, but she still holds on toward the fleet."

"She does indeed, though Fairfax must know they will knock her out of the water soon, unless he surrenders."

"He is putting about, sir! he is going to run back, for see, his lights wear round."

"You are right, Coxswain, Fairfax has found the odds too desperate for even his pluck, and he is coming back into port."

"He may be crippled yet, sir, before he gets out of range."

"Hardly now, I think, for the Blue Blockader is the fastest thing I ever saw afloat, and, though he ran out very slow, he'll come back like a deer— Hal! what is that?"

Both the men started as suddenly off on their right came heavy firing, and then a moment of silence and darkness.

"It is the fort, sir."

"Firing at the blockader? Impossible!"

"No, sir, there they open again," and once more the half-dozen guns of the fort flashed out and their roar rumbled across the waters.

"That commander is a fool, to open on the Blue Blockader at that distance and with the fleet in chase."

"I don't understand it, sir; but there goes the third broadside of the fort."

"Great God! look there!" and Ernest Fenton almost shrieked the words.

"The Blue Blockader!" gasped the Coxswain.

"It is, indeed!"

"What does it mean, sir?"

"It means, Coxswain, that yonder goes the Blue Blockader, now out of range of the fort, and with the fleet far astern, burning a blue-light upon his decks, to show the commodore he is out of all danger, while yonder craft running back to port is a foil."

"Sure!"

"You remember there was a small craft in tow?"

"Yes, sir, a very small steamer."

"Yes, and she set her lights after she struck open water, and I ended for the fleet, while the Blue Blockader, in total darkness, quietly took the channel inshore, and the people in the fort were so busy watching the foil fool the fleet, they did not notice the Sea Rebel until she was right upon them."

"That is it, sir, and she has gone clear."

"Oh, yes; Fairfax has again run the blockade, curses upon him!"

"Captain?"

"Well, Coxswain?"

"The little steamer is coming back, sir."

"I see her."

"We burned a light here, sir, and her commander may stop to investigate."

"By the Lord Harry, Coxswain, but you are right."

"We had better retreat, sir, until we see there is no danger."

"Yes, and we have no time to lose; quick, gather the box of lights, and I'll carry the provisions, while we must not forget the lanterns," and the two men hastened down from the light-house, seizing the things they wished to save as they went along.

It took them but a very short time to leave the light-house and gain their boat, Fenton having turned the key in the door after them.

Rapidly they pulled off upon the waters toward the point whereon was the pine thicket, just as the vessel that had acted as a foil for the Blue Blockader, came slowly up to the light-house, still under the fire of several of the cruisers, who had followed her in as far as they dared without knowing the waters.

"Captain."

"Well, Coxswain?"

"That is nothing but a large launch, sir, built up to look like a big vessel, and with tall spars set on for show, for I saw her distinctly then, as they brought some lanterns on deck."

"You are right, Coxswain, and she has well served her purpose; but they are going to land at the light-house, so we were fortunate."

"We were, indeed, sir," and with their boat

resting upon the waters, and in the shadow of the land, so that it could not possibly be seen, the two waited and watched.

For some little time the vessel remained alongside of the light-house pier, and then moved slowly away.

"They found nothing, sir."

"They did not find us, Coxswain," was the laconic reply.

"Shall we go back now, sir?"

"Yes, for I will not go up to the city to-night, as I am sadly in need of rest," and the Coxswain pulled back for the light-house basin.

Leaving the deserter to make the boat fast and bring the rest of the things, Ernest Fenton took some of them and started for the light-house, to suddenly utter a cry of alarm and start back, as two men sprung from the doorway upon him.

CHAPTER XIX.

CLOTILDE'S JEALOUSY.

WHEN Clotilde Varona rode away from the spot where Ernest Fenton had rescued her from robbery, and certainly a most disagreeable captivity, she mused deeply over what had occurred.

She felt that she had been the victim of a plot, and the man she loved so devotedly, Victor Fairfax, had been used as a means to play upon her affection, so that she would readily enter into the snare set for her by the villains.

Who it was that had rescued her she did not know, and she was greatly surprised that he should request that she did not speak of what had occurred to any one.

He had killed one of her assassins, that was certain, and afterward, while standing and talking to her, had not even glanced at the dead body.

He had asked her to go on her way and leave the man to be found by others, with no word from her that a dead body lay unburied by the roadway, and she had consented to this strange request.

Who is this mysterious person that knew who she was?

He was handsome, most striking-looking, and had shown pluck in coming to her rescue against odds, while his aim was deadly, and his manner wholly indifferent that he had taken a human life.

She had noticed on his head a fresh wound, and yet he had not spoken of it to her.

The more Clotilde meditated, the more she became bewildered, and at last, with an impatient exclamation, she urged her horse into a gallop.

"I cannot solve it, and so I will not try," she muttered.

"But there is one thing that I can and will do, and that is to break up this love affair between Victor and that Yankee girl."

"He still loves her, though she is against him in this war; but I know his high sense of honor too well not to know that his love can be changed to hatred, if I play my cards right."

"And I will play them to win against all odds, for no woman shall ever be the wife of Victor Fairfax, if I lose him."

"I have loved him since I was a little girl, when he came to our plantation home in Cuba, at the time when he was a midshipman in the United States Navy, and his vessel visited Havana for several weeks."

"His father and my father were as brothers, when they were at college together, and they wished that I should be Victor's wife, and I will."

"I was left to the guardianship of his father, and when Judge Fairfax died, Victor became my guardian, and I idolize him more and more every day of my life, for he is so noble, so handsome and so brave."

"I have made up my mind, be it ever so wrong, that if he does not wed Clotilde Varona, he shall never call other woman wife."

"He loves me as a sister, he says."

"*Madre de Dios!* a brother's love for me, when I love him with my whole heart and soul."

"Well, yonder is the home of Beatrice Benedict, and I am very much mistaken, if I cannot play upon her feelings in a way that will make her help me, for well I know that she loves Victor too."

"They say she is a spy, and was wounded in carrying secret papers through the lines, and came home to get well."

"So much the better, for she can help me in my plot, and I know not who else to call on."

Thus communing with herself, Clotilde rode along the highway, and turned into an open gateway that led to a small cottage-house back on the hillside.

Once, the place had doubtless been very pretty, and the fields surrounding it well-tilled, while the flower-garden had been an Eden of beauty; but now the stamp of neglect was upon all, the palings were off the fence, the walks were weed-grown, the flower-beds were filled with weeds, and upon all there was an air of decay.

Upon the little piazza, seated in an easy-chair, and looking wan and pale, sat a young girl, her left arm being worn in a sling.

Her form was well-rounded, her face handsome, darkly-bronzed, and with a most resolute

mouth and chin, while the large, black eyes were intensely sad in their expression.

She was dressed in a suit of Confederate gray cloth, trimmed with army buttons, and upon her head was a slouch hat with a black plume, and encircled by a gilt cord.

Altogether she was a strange-looking, but attractive maiden of twenty-two perhaps, though her face was now haggard from suffering.

As Clotilde rode up the maiden arose, and placing her fingers to her lips gave a long, shrill whistle.

It was answered by the appearance of a ragged negro boy of fourteen, coming around the corner of the house.

"Fox, go and take Miss Varona's horse to the stable," said the maiden, in a commanding way, and then she advanced to meet her visitor who had sprung from her saddle and was walking toward the cottage.

"I am glad to see you, Clotilde, and it is kind of you to visit me," she said, in a pleasant way.

"I hope your arm is better, Beatrice, for I have come to have a little talk with you if it will not disturb you."

"It will be a pleasure, I assure you, and, thank you, my arm is healing rapidly, but it was a severe wound."

"It was a wound then?"

Beatrice Benedict's face flushed, and after a slight hesitancy she replied:

"Yes, I will confess to you, Clotilde, that it was a wound, and I got it in Tennessee, when I was passing through the Union lines by night, and I did not halt when told to do so."

"They did not know I was a woman, and so fired on me when I ran, wounding me and also my horse; but I kept on and escaped."

"It is said that you are a spy, Beatrice."

"Yes, they say a great many things of me; but do not believe all you hear, Clotilde," and Beatrice smiled in a quiet way.

"Well, I came to see you to-day to have a little talk with you about one whom I believe to be a spy."

"Ah! who is that, may I ask?"

"A Yankee girl who lives down the bay-shore and who was once engaged to my adopted brother, Victor Fairfax."

Beatrice Benedict started at the name, but said calmly:

"Rumor had it that you were to marry Captain Fairfax, Clotilde."

"Do not believe all you hear about me, Beatrice, I will say as you did to me."

"Victor is as my brother, and I do not wish to see him marry the girl of whom I speak, and so I have come to you to help me."

"For me to help you?" and the brows were arched in amazement.

"Yes, for you can do so."

"Captain Fairfax has just made a superb run into port, my father tells me, for he was in town yesterday."

"Yes, he ran in under the fire of the entire fleet, and suffered the loss of some of his crew, while the Blue Blockader was cut up badly by the shot."

"I heard the firing, and it was indeed a severe gantlet for the brave little vessel to run; but then Captain Fairfax is a daring sailor and a skilful one, and would go through where many others would fail."

"Yes, and he is the hero of the day in town now."

"He deserves it; but when does he go out?"

"I do not know, and now he is away, having gone over to the plantation to see his mother and sister; but, Beatrice, do not let Victor marry that girl," and Clotilde uttered the last words most vehemently.

"Why Clotilde! how can I help it?"

"You can if you try."

"Who is she?"

"Belle Lamar, and she is with her aunt, Mrs. Dorsey, at The Breakers Plantation."

"Yes I know the place, and I have heard of Miss Lamar as very beautiful."

"She is indeed, and she has bewitched Victor completely, and I fear he may secretly marry her, if something is not done to prevent it."

"She is Northern, and he Southern."

"That makes no difference to him where she is concerned."

"I would dislike to see him marry Miss Lamar," said Beatrice Benedict, and an expression of pain passed over her face.

"I would do anything to prevent it, Beatrice, and so I came to you to help me."

"But what can I do?"

"As I told you, I believe she is a spy, and if she could be caught getting information from the Confederates, and sending it off to the fleet, she could be placed in prison and kept there, and this would turn Victor against her, I am sure."

"Does he think the loss of me because I am said to be a spy?" and there was a sneer in the tone of the question, as she spoke.

"Clotilde's face flushed, but she said quietly:

"It is different with you, Beatrice, for you felt bound to go to the army as a nurse, after your two brothers were killed, and she is here in the South, sowing out news against us, to assist our enemies."

Beatrice smiled in a winning way, for she did

not exactly see how it was that the rule would not work as well in favor of a Northern girl, as a Southern one; but she said in reply:

"If Miss Lamar is a spy, as you say, I will do what I can to help you entrap her, for I say again, Clotilde, I would not wish to see Captain Fairfax marry one who is an enemy."

"He shall not do so, I am determined; but will you set to work to find out about her?"

"Yes."

"And entrap her, if you find she is a spy?"

"I will."

"I thank you so much, for with Belle Lamar in prison, it will break Victor's love-dream for her," and Clotilde soon after rode away, while Beatrice Benedict, sitting on the little piazza and gazing after her, said:

"Yes, I will end his love-dream, if I can, but for my sake, not yours, Clotilde Varona, for I have not yet given up hope, not I, not I!"

CHAPTER XX.

THE SABLE MESSENGER.

"FOX, come here!"

The words came from the lips of Beatrice Benedict, and were addressed to the negro boy who had brought the horse of Clotilde Varona around for her, and was rejoicing over a generous fee which she had given him for his services.

"Yes, Missy Bee, I'm right here," said Fox, giving his pants a hitch to even them up, as he wore but one suspender.

The boy had a bright face, remarkably bright, when he wished to understand what was going on, and an expression that was stupid in the extreme when he wished to make any one believe him so.

His face now wore a grin, which increased in volume as Beatrice Benedict said:

"Fox, you are no fool."

"Not jist now, missy."

"I wish you to do something for me that may get you into serious trouble if you are caught in it."

"Yes, missy, but I don't be catched."

"So I hope; but do you know where The Breakers Plantation is?"

"Lordy, missy, don't you know I does?"

"I wish you to go there."

"Yes, missy."

"I wish you to go there and ask to see Miss Belle Lamar, a young lady who is staying at the plantation with Mrs. Dorsey."

"Yes, Missy Bee."

"You are to see her alone in some way, and then hand to her a letter I will give you for her."

"Yes, missy."

"I don't wish any one else to see the letter."

"No, missy."

"Can you hide it about your clothing somewhere, so if you are searched it would not be found?"

"Yes, missy, I kin do it."

"Now get ready for the trip, and I will have the letter for you; but remember, a man in the town gave it to you, but you don't know who he was, and you are to take the answer back to him."

"You is 'him, only you don't want her to know it, missy?"

"Yes, Fox."

"I'll do it, a' right, Missy Bee."

"You do so, and you shall have a Sunday suit of clothes, with hat, shoes and all."

"Golly! I'll look jist too fine, Missy Bee," and half an hour after, with the letter secreted somewhere about his apology for clothing, armed with a stout stick, and with a vicious-looking dog trotting at his heels, Fox, as sly and cunning as the animal whose name he bore, started out upon his expedition, greatly feeling his importance.

Toward evening of the same day, Belle Lamar, as was her wont, was seated in the pavilion on the end of the pier, watching the coming of a man-of-war boat from the fleet.

"It is my father, for I recognize him now," she said aloud, as the boat drew nearer, and soon after Captain Lamar sprung out upon the pier and was most affectionately greeted by her father.

"My dear child, I am not so sure you are looking well, and I will try and run ashore oftener to see you; but we are kept constantly on the alert for the blockade-runners now, and I can only leave for a few hours at a time," said Captain Lamar, as the two walked toward the house together.

"I have been a little anxious of late, sir, but that is all," replied Belle, while her father added:

"You saw the daring act of your old friend Fairfax the other night, in raising his vessel through the fleet?"

"Oh, yes, sir, and it was indeed a bold act."

"The bravest I ever saw done, as all in our fleet admit, while Captain Marsden recognized Fairfax, who spoke to him, as he ran by, damaging the stern of his vessel some."

"It looked as though the Blue Blockader meant to run the Patrol down."

"Yes, so we all thought, as did Marsden, too; but he meant to sacrifice his vessel to destroy the blockade-runner, well knowing the immense value her freight was to the Confederates."

"Marsden lay right in her way, but Fairfax calculated well, stood at the wheel himself, and made the dash by, crippling the Patrol so that she could not follow him, or fire on him; but I wrote you of that fellow Fenton's treachery toward Fairfax?"

"Yes, sir, and it is no more than I expected at his hands."

"I can honor those Southerners, who, believing they are right, went with their States, and battled for a principle, opposed though it is to our views; but I detest a man such as Ernest Fenton, who sided with his people to betray them."

"I am glad to hear you speak so, my child, for I have always been fearful of that fascinating rascal's influence over you."

"Oh, father!"

"I have no fear now, and I sent him away from my vessel, and he went to the commodore and has told him of certain things he can do, to catch blockade-runners, and of course as it is war, his services were accepted; but do not let him visit you."

"I will not, sir, you may be assured."

"And, Belle, I learned from an off-shore boat this morning that an alarm had been sounded last night, shots having been heard here on the grounds."

"There were shots heard, sir; I heard them myself; but the Patrol found nothing to show what had caused them; but the commandant of the fort has placed a sentry at our service at night now, and he is to be stationed there in the arbor vitae summer-house, so we will have no fear."

"I am glad of this; but here we are at the mansion, and I see your Aunt Ellen coming to meet us."

After an hour's pleasant chat, Captain Lamar took his leave, the ladies escorting him back to the end of the pier, where Belle remained in the pavilion watching his receding boat, while Mrs. Dorsey returned to the mansion, for she seldom left the house except for a drive.

For some time did Belle Lamar sit silently gazing out over the waters, her thoughts evidently of a sad nature, for her eyes drooped and lips quivered now and then.

Then she started, for suddenly came the words:

"How do, missy?"

It was Fox, the negro messenger of Beatrice Benedict that stood before her.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE FATAL AMBUSH.

I WILL now return to the haunted light-house, which the reader will remember Ernest Fenton and the deserter went back to, after having gone off in their boat, while the search was being made by the crew of the little vessel that had so well proven a foil to the escape of the Blue Blockader.

The craft which Victor Fairfax had selected as a foil, was a small one that lay in port, and was neither very fast, nor very servicable.

Much smaller than was the Blue Blockader, the ingenuity of Captain Fairfax had been brought into play, and a framework had been hastily made over her, and upon it was stretched canvas, painted black, while dummy masts and spars had been added, which at night gave her the appearance of a much larger vessel than she was.

With three officers and a crew of twenty men on board, who had volunteered for the dangerous work, the foil steamer had been taken in tow by the Blue Blockader, and, as the reader has seen, passed the light-house with her.

Then the lights on the foil were set, and before she was cut loose, Victor Fairfax said to her young commander:

"Remember, Lawton, you are not to go too near the fleet, so as to be crippled, but to stand toward them, as though you meant boldly to push through the blockade."

"When you get as near as you dare go, then put back with all haste, for by that time I will be close on the fort and have to take its fire, as I will have no fear of the fleet, taking the in-shore channel as I do."

"Now, good-by, and fortune attend you," and then the two vessels swung apart, the Blue Blockader, black as night itself, slipping along inshore, while the foil steamer headed for the main channel, as though intending to run the desperate gantlet of the fleet.

As the reader has seen, the ruse succeeded admirably, and would have met with no hitch, but for the treacherous lighting of the lights in the Haunted Light-house.

"You must catch that traitor on your way back, Lawton Moore, and I would wager high that it is none other than the man who attempted to capture me on my run in," said Victor Fairfax.

Lawton Moore promised to search the light-house on his way back, and, lo and behold, he did so, seeing from the top of the light-house that the foil steamer was coming.

But no minute was fulfilled, with nothing of a surprise nature was discovered to lead the young commander to believe that the light-house had lately been occupied, other than that the alarm-

ture and other things belonging to the former keepers were there.

"You know they call it the Haunted Light-house, Lieutenant Moore," suggested a midshipman, half in earnest, half in jest.

"You think then, Stafford, that ghosts, friendly to the United States, must have betrayed the fact, by burning the lights, that the Blue Blockader was going to run out?" asked Lawton Moore, with a smile.

"It looks so, sir, to me," returned the midshipman, in a solemn tone; but he added, quickly:

"I'm willing to risk a fight with the ghosts, sir, if you will allow me to remain here with a good man."

"A good idea, Paul, for, seeing us depart, that fellow, whoever he is, may come out from his hiding-place, which we have been unable to find."

"Arm yourself and select your man to remain with you."

"I'll take Boatswain Buntline, sir, if you can spare him."

"Certainly," and soon after Lieutenant Moore gave the command in a loud voice to go back on board the vessel, and all of the crew obeyed, excepting the midshipman and the boatswain, who concealed themselves in the Light-house just by the door.

The Foil stood on her way back to port, and as silent as mice the midshipman, and the boatswain waited in the darkness.

Soon they heard the rattle of an oar, falling in a boat, and Paul Stafford whispered:

"He is coming in a boat, so open the door, bo'sen, and be ready for him."

A moment after Ernest Fenton advanced to the light-house, carrying the box he had brought from the boat, and instantly he was seized in the strong arms of the boatswain, while the midshipman shoved a pistol in his face and said sternly:

"You are a prisoner, sir!"

The cry of alarm given by Fenton quickly brought the deserter to his aid, and somehow neither Midshipman Stafford, or the boatswain had expected to find more than one man.

A blow on the head felled the gallant midshipman, ere he was aware of the presence of another foe, and then the deserter sprang upon the boatswain, at the same time dealing him a heavy blow with the pistol with which he had struck Paul Stafford.

But Boatswain Buntline was a giant in size, and a most powerful man, and he grappled with his foe, and strong as the deserter was, might have mastered him after a fierce struggle; but suddenly Ernest Fenton stepped up to them, a cry broke from the lips of the boatswain, and he staggered back and fell heavily, while the deserter cried in an excited tone:

"Great God! you have killed him, sir."

"Yes, I knifed him, for we have no time for fighting, nor am I in the humor for it," was the cool reply.

"Do you think he is dead, sir?"

"I know it, for my blade went to the hilt, and I have half a mind to use it on that fellow too."

"No, Captain, don't do any more unnecessary red work, but let us see how badly I hurt this man," and the deserter lighted a lantern and turned it upon the face of the unconscious midshipman.

"He is but a youth, and I am sorry; but the blow merely stunned him, and cut a wound over his temple, so he'll be all right soon."

"I know him and I must not let him recognize me."

"Dead men tell no tales, and I will—"

"No, Captain," and the deserter caught the uplifted hand of Ernest Fenton, which would have slain the youth with a blow of his pistol-barrel.

"Do you dare me, Coxswain?"

"No, Captain, but do not commit murder," was the firm reply.

"I tell you he knows me."

"Then let us, blindfold and bind him, and I will row him up to the town and leave him near it."

"No, for you would be taken."

"There is their boat, so put them both into it; the tide is running out and the current will bear them directly through the fleet, and the midshipman can hail some vessel."

"And be taken prisoner?"

"It is better than being killed," was the laconic reply.

"True, sir."

The body of the boatswain was then raised in the arms of the two men and borne to the boat, that had been left for them, and which was made fast a few paces away.

The midshipman was also placed in it, and it was observed that he was rapidly returning to consciousness.

Taking the oars out of the boat, it was set adrift, and the tide, now running out, bore it swiftly seaward with its dead and living freight, while the pilot and the deserter watched it until it disappeared in the darkness, the former remarking quietly:

"It will be either imprisonment or death for that midshipman; but better that either be his fate than mine."

CHAPTER XXII.

SUSPENSE.

AFTER leaving the cottage home of Beatrice Benedict, Clotilde Varona did not return to the town, but rode on to the country residence of an old friend, where she was often wont to extend her ride and spend the day.

It was late when she arrived again at her home, the city mansion of the Fairfax family, and the son of the lady whom she had been visiting escorted her back to town, for Clotilde, from some reason, did not wish to return until after nightfall.

The fact is, she wished to avoid being questioned as to where she had been, did she find that Victor Fairfax had returned from the plantation.

Also, she desired to hear what story was told regarding the finding of the dead man by the roadside, whom Ernest Fenton had killed in her defense.

She had begun to plot, and naturally felt a little nervous in her first step in a wrong direction, which had thus far given her a secret with an unknown man, who had rescued her from her captors, and also placed the pitfall into which she hoped to entrap Belle Lamar.

Upon arriving at the mansion, she urged her escort to come in and have supper with her, and she found the servants extremely anxious about her.

After supper the youthful escort mounted his horse and rode back home, and Clotilde at once sought James, the negro factotum of the mansion.

"James, I saw that you had something to tell me," she said, "but I did not care to hear it before that boy."

"Yes, Miss Clo, Master Victor has been here, and left good-by for you," answered James.

"Left good-by? Has he gone, and where?" and Clotilde was upon her feet, her face pale and eyes flashing.

"Yes, Miss Clo, he has gone to sea again, for orders came for him, he told me, while he was over at the plantation."

"He said he was very sorry not to see you, for the life he lead was a dangerous one; but he hoped to get through all right and to see you again before very long."

"Gone! gone!— But hark!"

As she spoke there came the deep boom of a heavy gun, then another, and another.

"That firing is down the bay, James, and poor Victor is trying to run out."

"Oh, God! have mercy upon him, pray you!"

"This is fearful! Just listen to the thundering guns, James, and tell me how he can ever escape."

"Spare him, oh God! spare him!" and with the intensity of her feelings, Clotilde reeled and would have fallen, had not James caught her in his strong arms.

There was no need to call for help, for the servants, alarmed by the heavy firing down the bay, had gathered in the room, thinking that Clotilde might know the cause.

They were devotedly attached to her, though they were sometimes surprised at her impulsive humors, so different from the nature of Beulah Fairfax, their young mistress.

But then Clotilde was ever most kind to the servants, and they were alarmed at her swooning away, and while one ran for the family physician, the others sought to revive her.

But she soon recovered, and sent to have the doctor's coming stopped, while she sat and listened to the distant crashing of the guns, until no longer a sound was heard.

"The Blue Blockader is taken, I feel, or has been sunk," she said, sorrowfully, and soon after she called to James and told him to have the carriage ready for her, immediately after breakfast, as she would drive down to the shore and see what news had been learned of the Sea Rebel's run out.

Then she went to her room, and while Clio, her Cuban maid, slept upon a rug, she paced the floor until at last, utterly worn out, she threw herself on her bed and sunk to sleep.

Breakfast was awaiting her, when Clio awakened her, and hastily dressing she went down and partook of a strong cup of coffee, for she could not eat, with the suspense she was suffering regarding the fate of the man she so madly loved.

"Is the carriage ready, James?" she asked, quickly, as the negro butler entered.

"Yes, Miss Clo, it just drew up at the door." Sweeping out of the house she sprang into the vehicle and said:

"Sam, drive with all haste down to the shore, where the cruiser Morgan is being fitted out."

"Yes, miss," and Sam sent the stylish team along at a rapid pace and drew up at the shipyard just as Lieutenant Lawton Moore was coming out, dressed up in his best uniform.

"Ah, Miss Clotilde, I was just going up to see you," and he advanced quickly toward the carriage.

"Your face tells me that you have no bad tidings to make known," she said, with a sigh of relief.

"No indeed, but on the contrary good tid-

ings, for the Blue Blockader ran out last night in splendid style."

"Through all that heavy firing?"

"Miss Clotilde, only a part of the firing was at the Blue Blockader, and, as it is no secret now, I may as well tell you that my little craft, the Foil, went down with the Sea Rebel, drew the fire of the fleet, and, while they were wasting ammunition on me, the Blue Blockader slipped out to sea, running the gantlet of the fire from the fort, which, as far as we could judge, did her no harm."

"You give me most pleasant news, Lieutenant Moore," and tears of joy came into Clotilde's beautiful eyes.

"I am more than glad to hear you say so," responded the young officer, who was over head and ears in love with the Cuban girl, and he added:

"Captain Fairfax asked me to go up and see you, Miss Clotilde, and tell if he got out all right, while he was sorry not to have seen you last evening."

"And so am I; but I was out in the country spending the day; but, Lieutenant Moore, I beg of you to bring me word if you get any more news of Victor."

"I will indeed," was the quick reply.

"You do not think the vessel was harmed?"

"No, I think not."

"But might not some of her crew have been killed?" anxiously asked Clotilde.

"Possibly; but I am sure Captain Fairfax was not injured, as he alone knew how to run the Blue Blockader through the inshore channel, and after receiving the fire of the fort, she went to sea flying."

"Then the fleet opened on you, and the fort on the Sea Rebel?"

"Yes, miss, but I kept well out of the way, and the vessel was hit but three times, and only one of my men wounded."

"In fact, but for a traitor being in the old haunted light-house, who announced the Blue Blockader's coming by a blue light, I think she would have gotten by the fort unseen in time to fire upon her."

"But who was this traitor in the light-house?"

"I cannot tell, for we found no one after a careful search; but Midshipman Stafford and a man remained to capture him, should he return, and I have been expecting them up in their boat ever since sunrise."

"I hope no harm has befallen the young midshipman."

"I sincerely trust not, Miss Clotilde; but if he does not return by night I shall go down with a boat's crew and look for them."

"Not before?"

"The truth is the light-house stands on half-way ground, as it were, and we are liable to find it occupied by a United States crew, so I have to be cautious, while, if the commodore of the blockading squadron thought that we meant to occupy it, he would doubtless do the same, and with the fleet that much nearer in we would find it impossible to run a blockader out, and would have to erect batteries on the shore to keep the vessels off out of range."

"Well, Lieutenant Moore, let me know tomorrow if Midshipman Stafford returns in safety, and any other news you may gain about the Blue Blockader."

"I will, with pleasure," and Lawton Moore bowed low as the carriage drove away, while he muttered to himself:

"She is beautiful, lovable, rich, and I am desperately in love with her, so shall go into action to make her strike her colors if I can, for Victor Fairfax assured me he regarded her only as a sister, and told me to go in and win her if I could."

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE MIDSHIPMAN.

WHEN Midshipman Paul Stafford returned to consciousness he was unable at first to collect his thoughts.

He felt the motion of the boat as it danced about upon the waves and was borne seaward.

His head ached, and he raised his hand to his forehead.

As he did so he felt that his hair was wet, and then his fingers touched the wound from which the blood flowed.

The wound was on the top of the head, to one side, and his cap had saved the blow from being more severe, and perhaps fracturing his skull.

As it was it had knocked him senseless.

"Ah! I think I recall what has happened."

"The boatswain and myself were at the Haunted Light-house, and pounced upon a man who came there, and I got this blow."

"Am I in the boat and the boatswain pulling me, or—" and he raised up and glanced about him.

Nothing but water was in sight, with far off a few lights.

"Where am I?"

He again looked about him, and then his eyes fell upon the form near him in the boat.

Instantly he moved toward it, and cried, as he laid his hand upon the upturned face:

"It is the bo'sen, and he is dead."

A moment of silence, and he sat motionless. Then he passed his hand again and again over his face, while he murmured:

"The ghosts of the Haunted Light-house were too much for us."

"Poor bo'sen, poor Bo'sen Buntline!"

Leaning over, he put his hand into the sea and bathed his face.

Then he took out his handkerchief, and wetting it, bound it about his wounded head, and began to search for an oar.

But nothing was in the boat excepting the dead and the living, and he looked over the waters to take in thoroughly his situation.

It was not long before he discovered that he was rapidly going out to sea on the tide, and must pass through the blockading squadron.

"I'm in a bad plight," he muttered.

"I cannot reach the shore, for I have no means of doing so, and should I pass through the fleet unseen, which I hardly think likely, I will die at sea of starvation, for commerce has gone from these waters now, and I would not see a vessel perhaps for days."

"If I am discovered, then I am a prisoner, so what shall I do?"

For a long time the midshipman meditated upon his unfortunate situation, while the tide bore him nearer and nearer to the fleet.

It was very dark, and there was a possibility that he might pass through the squadron unseen, his boat being low in the water.

But was it not better to end suspense by hailing some vessel and surrendering?

He seemed to feel that those who had met him at the light-house, wounded him and slain poor Boatswain Buntline were Federals, and perhaps a crew from one of the vessels in the fleet, sent there to give an early warning of any attempt of a blockade-runner to get to sea.

"I was foolish not to ask the lieutenant for more men; but then it is done now, and I must make the best of it."

And he turned his eyes upon the fleet he was so rapidly nearing.

One vessel lay almost in his way, and he determined to hail, for he was weak from loss of blood and his head pained him severely.

"Ship ahoy!" he called out as he saw that he was drifting by without being discovered.

"Ay, ay! whereaway?" called out a voice from on board the cruiser.

"Just off your port stern quarter, a cable's length."

"Ay, ay; come aboard!"

"I am adrift and have no oars, sir."

"All right; I'll send a boat after you."

And a few moments after a boat came rapidly toward him, and in ten minutes more he was on the deck of the vessel and said:

"I am a midshipman in the Confederate Navy, sir, and surrender myself to you, as I can do nothing else."

"Indeed! you seem to have been in hard luck; but come into the cabin and see Captain Marsden, for he has not yet retired; in fact, your rebel blockaders keep us awake all night, and we get what sleep we can by day."

And the lieutenant laughed lightly at the hardship and asked the midshipman to follow him into the cabin.

Seated at the table reading was an officer of thirty, with a handsome face full of intelligence, boldness and manliness.

He was in undress uniform and glanced up as the midshipman was ushered into the cabin, while the latter as his eyes fell upon him thought to himself:

"That man is a sailor and a gentleman, and I was in luck to hail this vessel."

"Captain Marsden, I have a voluntary prisoner here, sir, a midshipman in the navy of our Confederate Brethren of the Sea."

"You did not give me your name, sir?" and the lieutenant addressed the last remark to the midshipman, who said:

"My name is Paul Stafford, sir, and by reference to the navy register you will see that I served two years at Annapolis as a United States naval cadet, but resigned, and have since been in the Confederate sea service, what there is of it," and he smiled.

"There is getting to be more of the Confederate navy than we find comfortable for ourselves, sir; but be seated, and tell me how it is that we have the honor of your company?" and Captain Marsden hastily added in a kindly way:

"But you are wounded, my young friend?"

"Yes, sir, but I do not think it is serious."

"We will soon know; please send Surgeon Du Bose here, Mr. Haskell," and the lieutenant left the cabin, while Captain Marsden said:

"Now, Midshipman Stafford, I will hear what you have to tell."

"The story is a short one, sir, for I came down on the vessel that served as a foil, to help the Blue Blockader out to sea, and we were betrayed by a blue-light, thrown over from the Haunted Light-house, as we passed."

"On our way back I landed, with Boatswain Buntline, a splendid fellow, to see who was there to betray us, and remained in hiding, while the vessel returned to port."

"Who it was I have not been able to discover, other than that we seized a man, who returned, and that is all I knew until I found myself

adrift in my boat, wounded, as you see, sir, and with Bo'sen Buntline lying dead by me, a knife, or sword-thrust in his side."

"There were no oars in the boat, and the tide bore me near you, and I hailed, rather than drift out to sea."

"That is all my story, sir."

"And an interesting story it is, Mr. Stafford, and one that interests me, for whoever it was in the light-house was certainly friendly to us."

"Yes, sir; but I am sure there were more than one, for we had hold of one man when I received my blow; but being insensible I could do nothing, nor did I know anything, as I said, until I found myself in the boat."

"And what a clever trick that Blue Blockader served us!" and Captain Marsden smiled.

"She is commanded, sir, by one of the finest officers in our service."

"Victor Fairfax?"

"You know him then, sir?"

"We were middies together, and afterward served as officers on the same vessel, and were like brothers."

"He nearly ran me down the other night in going in, and crippled me for a while; but I recognized him then, as he did me; but to-night he gave us the slip most cleverly, and although several of our vessels followed in chase, it is useless, for that craft of his runs like a frightened hare."

"She is the fleetest of all the runners, sir, it is said, and Captain Fairfax goes in her where he pleases."

"Some night we will catch him, though; but he lives somewhere on this bay, I believe?"

"Yes, sir; his mother has a plantation several leagues from your present anchorage, and is there now, with her daughter."

"Well, Mr. Stafford, I hardly know what to say about your case, for I cannot hold you as a prisoner, and yet you are one; but to-morrow I will talk to the commodore and decide, and in the meanwhile you shall be cared well for, and the boatswain shall be buried; but here is Surgeon Du Bose, and he will look after you now."

The surgeon examined the wound closely, and said:

"You had a close call, young sir, for a little more force would have fractured your skull."

"As it is, you must not worry, but take care of yourself, as you have lost considerable blood and fever may follow."

So the midshipman's wound was carefully dressed, and he retired to a state-room assigned him by the kind-hearted Federal commander; but the next morning he awoke feeling really ill, and Captain Marsden told him that the commodore had decided not to hold him under the circumstances, and he was free to be set on shore, if so he wished.

"I do not feel very bright, sir, and if I am going to be ill, would ask to be taken on shore, if not too much trouble, to the plantation of Mrs. Fairfax, who would care for me, I know," said Paul.

"Willingly, and I will take you there myself, as soon as it is dark, for I dare not attempt to go by day and land, as your troops are doubtless near there."

Soon after the boatswain was buried in the sea, the ship's chaplain reading the service over him, and just at twilight the cruiser's cutter rowed away, with eight men at the oars, a marine guard, and Captain Herbert Marsden, who was himself accompanying the wounded midshipman, now suffering with fever, as the surgeon had feared would be the case.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE DECOY.

THE reader remembers that while Belle Lamar was seated in the pier pavilion, after the visit of her father, she was startled by suddenly hearing the words:

"How-do, missy?"

It was Black Fox, as his parents had named him in baptism, but whose cognomen, as though his color was sufficient without the prefix, to carry out the idea intended, dropped down to Foxy, or Fox.

Both names were *apropos*, for he was very black, and also very foxy in his nature, for his cunning was such that though full of the Old Harry, he managed to get out of all scrapes most slyly.

Intelligent beyond his years, and idolizing his young mistress, Beatrice Benedict, who had always been his particular friend and benefactor, he was well suited for the work for which he had been selected.

He prided himself upon the confidence placed in him, and upon arriving at the plantation had asked where he could find "Missy Belle Lamar?"

"What does you wish wid de leddy?" asked the negro whom he had questioned.

"Ef I tells you what I wants, why does I has ter see her?" was the reply that seemed to stump the one he addressed, who said:

"You is a strange nigger, hain't yer?"

"Waal, I knows myself putty well, though I was stranger ter you."

"You better go an' see ole mister, fer she don't like no strange niggers round here."

"I doesn't want ter see ole mis', but young missy, and ef yer isn't gemman 'nough ter tell me whar she is, I kin find her I guesses."

"I seen her going down on de pier little while ago."

"Yonder?"

"Yas."

"Is yer got no dogs 'round heah?"

"We has."

"I hain't afeerd o' 'em myself, but I doesn't want my dog Snags to hurt 'em," and Fox gave a look of affection at his dog, that sat crouching at his heels.

"Our dogs is bad, I kin tell yer."

"Dere is trees 'round, I sees, and does yer see that rope round Snags's neck?"

"Yas."

"Waal, I kin climb a tree and pull Snags up arter me, I guesses, if dey gits too bumptious fer us," and Fox walked away toward the pier, the dog trotting at his heels, and Belle Lamar did not hear his approach and started at his salutation.

He had his hat off, and was grinning from ear to ear, and the maiden suspected that he was from the plantation quarters, though she failed to recall having seen him before.

"Good mornin'," she said, pleasantly, in response, while Fox asked:

"Is you Missy Belle Lamar, missy?"

"Yes, that is my name, and who, may I ask, are you?"

"Me Fox, missy, and dis yer dog o' mine he name Snags."

"Well, I am glad to make the acquaintance of you, Fox, though I think Snags has a very vicious look."

"Yas, missy, he am vicious, very vicious; but he lubs you, as I kin see ly de way he wags his tail; but, missy, I hab a letter fer you."

Belle Lamar started, for where had a letter come from for her she wondered.

"A letter for me?"

"Yes, missy."

"Where are you from?"

"From up near de town, missy."

"You do not belong here on the plantation?"

"Oh, no, missy."

"Who sent you?"

"A gemman in de town, missy."

Belle's thoughts at once turned upon Victor Fairfax, and she felt that he had written her, and should not have done so, as all between them had ended.

"Give me the letter, boy," she said, in a cold manner, and Fox went fishing for it, to at last drag it forth from some secret receptacle about his apparel.

"It is not his writing, and yet is addressed in a man's hand."

"It is not from Ernest Fenton either, or at least it is not his hand that addressed it."

"Where did you get this?"

"From a gemman, missy."

"In the city?"

"Yas, missy," and Fox lied without the slightest compunctions of conscience.

"He bade you give it to me?"

"If you is Missy Belle Lamar, missy."

"I am," and she broke the seal, and read as follows:

"THURSDAY.

"I am serving my country in a secret capacity, and am stationed in the city, gleanings what information I can get of the movements, strength and fortified positions of the rebels."

"I find it hard to convey my information to my own side, and knowing that Miss Lamar is dwelling at her aunt's on The Breakers plantation, I appeal to her patriotism and love of the Union to aid me."

"To do so, she will only have to meet me or my mess near twice each week, during her horseback rides, at a certain point in the forest, and receive certain papers of importance, of vast value to our cause, and which she can readily deliver to her father, or the commodore of the blockading squadron."

"A reply, by the bearer, will oblige, and the one who delivers you this will show you where is the designated rendezvous, or tell you just how to find it, and Wednesday and Friday will be the days appointed for our meeting, the hours being at five o'clock of the afternoon of each day."

"With sincere respect,

"SPY."

"U. S. Secret Service."

As Belle Lamar read this letter her face flushed and paled by turns, and then she read it over a second time, after which she said:

"Tell me just how you got this letter, boy?"

"Missy, I wuks at home, on de Hill road is whar my massa lubs, and the gemman he comes to de house an axe massa ef he hab somebody as c'd take a letter to you and do it right, and he says as how he hab a little nigger, meanin' me, missy, as w'd do it, and den he gib me de letter an' tell me ter band it right inter your own hand, missy, or fetch it back ter him."

Then Belle questioned the young negro closely, but Fox was on the alert, told all he wished to tell in a straightforward manner, and knew nothing about that which he thought he should not speak of.

Springing to her feet the maiden paced to and fro, her face clouded, her lips set, excepting when they parted now and then to utter some expression half aloud.

"I will do it," at last she said, firmly, and opening a drawer in the rustic table in the pa-

vilion, she took out pen, ink and paper, and hastily wrote a reply.

"Where is this place in the forest, which this letter says you were to show me?" she asked Fox, who had seated himself upon the edge of the pier and was gazing at the distant fleet.

"Does yer know whar de big plantation gate am, missy?"

"The one toward the town?"

"Yas, missy."

"I know it well."

"Dere am a Injun mound, wid three magnolia trees growin' on it, off to de left, missy, about four hundred yards."

"I know it well."

"Right dere, missy."

"All right; now take this letter back to the one you received this one from, and see that not another person receives it."

"Yes, missy."

"Here is some silver for you, and do not speak to any one you may meet, as to why you came here."

"No, missy, I kin keep a secret, and thank you for de money, missy," and with a scrape of his foot and doffing his tattered apology for a hat, Fox set off upon his return, Snags trotting at his heels, and leaving Belle Lamar pacing to and fro, a most troubled expression upon her beautiful face.

CHAPTER XXV.

BETWEEN LOVE AND DUTY.

It had seemed a fearfully long day to Belle Lamar, for after the exciting meeting with her rebel lover the night before, the surprise, the shots, and the falling, as though dead, of the one who had come upon them and demanded the surrender of Victor Fairfax, she had not been able to get much sleep, so great was her suspense.

The next morning she had heard with surprise that there was no one found dead upon the premises, though of course she had not dared ask the question, but knew she would have heard it, had a body been found.

What this meant she could not imagine, and so she took a walk along the beach, wending her way toward the fort, very well aware that she would but have to be seen to be joined by some officer from the camp.

This happened as she had expected, for the commandant himself, seeing her strolling along as though in search of rare shells, came toward her with quick step.

"Out for a stroll this morning, Miss Lamar?" he said, pleasantly.

"Yes, Major Breslin; I am not feeling very bright this morning, so am taking a short walk."

"You belie your looks, Miss Lamar, for you are looking as bright as can be; but I fear you were disturbed by the alarm last night," said the officer, joining her as she now turned homeward, for, having "caught her fish" in the little net she had spread, she was anxious to leave the vicinity of Fort Lookout.

His remark was just what she wished to lead up to the question:

"Yes; I was alarmed, indeed, Major Breslin, for I heard the two shots distinctly, and have not yet learned who it was that was hurt?"

"No one that we have been able to discover, Miss Lamar, though our guards patrolled the beach and grounds thoroughly."

"And what caused the shots, sir?"

"We are at a loss to discover; but I have ordered a sentry placed in the grounds of your aunt's home each night now."

"It is very kind of you, sir, and I will thank you for her and also myself; but was nothing of a suspicious nature discovered?"

"Nothing."

"No prisoners taken?"

"Not one; and my idea is that it was some of the negroes prowling about for the purpose of seeing the soldiers turn out."

"I am glad to hear you say so, Major Breslin; but what do you think of the running in of the Blue Blockader the other night?"

"It was the most daring thing I ever saw, and I can assure you that we could hardly restrain a cheer for the gallant fellow when we saw him make his escape, though his gain was our loss," said the gallant officer.

"If he had run in near the fort I suppose you could have sunk him?"

"I am not so sure of that, Miss Lamar, for our guns have but a certain short range and can do little damage to a vessel moving as did the Blue Blockader, unless we hit her in a vital spot."

"The channel inshore only allows of a vessel of certain draught going through, and that only at high tide; but if we had a couple of miles to open on him with we might sink or disable him, though we have no fear that any craft will attempt to run by us, as we look far more deadly than we are."

"I wish this cruel war was at an end, Major Breslin."

"As I do, Miss Lamar; but I fear it will be a long and bloody struggle; but now I must leave you," and the major, taking his departure, left Belle Lamar wondering what had become of the

man who had fallen under the fire of Victor Fairfax.

Then she felt happy to know that the Blockader captain had escaped, and yet her manner was *distrain* all day.

Her father's visit to her gave her pleasure, and then came Fox with his letter, and altogether the maiden had an exciting day of it.

When night came she sat out upon the piazza with her aunt, the two discussing the war and its terrors, but feeling more comfortable now that they knew a sentinel stood within a hundred yards of them.

It was a dark night, for the stars were shut out by clouds; but the air was balmy and pleasant, the scent of a hundred flowers mingled with the salty breeze off the Gulf, and lured by the soothing influence the two remained upon the piazza later than was their wont.

Suddenly a gleam of fire was visible far up toward the town, and the distant light-house was revealed for a moment, and passing it, her prow headed seaward, a vessel was visible.

A groan escaped the lips of Belle Lamar, for in that instant of light she had thought she had recognized the Blue Blockader.

"He is going to dare that death gantlet again," she said, in a low whisper.

"It is a vessel coming out; but why did she betray her intention?" said Mrs. Dorsey.

"I do not know! I cannot tell," almost moaned Belle.

"Missy, the vessel was betrayed, for that light was thrown from the top of the Haunted Light-house, as I saw distinctly, and it warned the fleet that the Blue Blockader was going to run out," and old Uncle Ned came up the steps of the mansion, having been taking a walk in the grounds.

"Then you recognized the vessel, Uncle Ned?"

"Yes, missy, it was the same that run in the other night."

"Then she will put back now?" Mrs. Dorsey remarked.

"No, there she goes right toward the fleet, and has set her lights as if in defiance," cried the maiden.

All now gazed upon the rapidly-moving lights, saw alarm signals on the fleet, and responded to by the fort, and waited breathlessly for the firing to begin upon the daring blockade-runner.

Soon it began, and still the lights rushed toward the fleet, and then, all of a sudden, with a terrific crash that seemed to shake the earth, the fort opened.

Mrs. Dorsey uttered a cry of alarm, and Belle sprung to her feet, for all now saw that a vessel was close inshore and going by the fort like a race-horse.

Again came the guns, and their red glare revealed the craft.

"The Blue Blockader! look, missy, look!" shouted Uncle Ned.

"God help him!" groaned Belle, and clasping her hands tightly together, she waited, watched, saw the blue-light burned upon the Sea Rebel, as though a sign to her from Victor Fairfax, and then away into the darkness, seemingly unharmed, swept the Blue Blockader, while after her, though far astern, in full chase, started half a dozen vessels of the fleet.

Was it a wonder that Belle Lamar laid her head upon the pillow that night with a heart full of conflicting emotions, for once more had her rebel lover triumphed, though over her own people?

The next day Major Breslin called and told the story of the Blue Blockader captain's clever ruse to get out to sea, and how, in the darkness, he had almost passed the fort before he was seen, for all eyes were bent upon the distant lights bearing down upon the fleet.

"We will catch him yet," said the major.

"God grant it," murmured Belle, adding to herself:

"Then he will be kept out of deadly danger by being held a prisoner of war."

Looking at her watch she started, and the moment the major departed she mounted her horse and rode away, taking the road that led her to the rendezvous at the Indian mound, with the Secret Service spy.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE SAILOR LOVER.

HAVING brought the scenes of my story and the action of the characters therein up to the day following the running out to sea of the Blue Blockader, I will now return to the boat that left by night, the cruiser Patrol, bearing on board the young Confederate midshipman, suffering with fever, which had, as the surgeon had feared, followed his wound on the head.

Had any one asked Captain Herbert Marsden why he had taken so deep an interest in the wounded midshipman, he could have truthfully answered that it was from sheer sympathy and kindness of heart on his part.

He knew those friendly to the Union side had betrayed the Blue Blockader's coming out to the fleet, and hence had been the one to kill Boatswain Buntline and wounded Paul Stafford.

Of course, hailed as had been the Patrol by the middy, and picked up wounded, and with a

dead comrade, no one with any feeling in his heart for his fellow-man, would have cared to hold the young Confederate sailor as a prisoner, and so Captain Marsden, a man of particularly noble impulses, was most anxious to set him free.

But it is susceptible of doubt if he would have gone ashore in the boat that took him there, had not Paul Stafford expressed a desire to go to the home of Mrs. Fairfax, at the Retreat Plantation.

The truth must be told that the gallant captain, Union officer though he was, had a very great desire to see the sister of Victor Fairfax, his old shipmate and friend.

When they were middies together, Victor had often spoken of his little sister Beulah, and had urged Herbert Marsden to go home with him on a visit, should the opportunity ever offer.

This the Northern youth had been most anxious to do, and had promised, but twice unseen circumstances had been thrown in the way.

Just before the breaking out of the war, when both were officers upon the same vessel, Victor Fairfax had received from home miniature likenesses of his mother and sister.

The one was a handsome woman of three-score years, with an aristocratic, proud mien, but withal most kindly in expression, and the other was a face such as Herbert Marsden had never before seen.

The more he looked at it the more it seemed to fascinate him, and one day he surreptitiously got possession of it, and being an artist of considerable talent, painted from it a miniature of rare beauty.

All of his skill he threw into the work, and the lovely face of Beulah Fairfax was not only reproduced perfectly, but so painted that it seemed a perfect masterpiece of art.

Having the likeness set in a handsome frame, the young sailor hid it away from all eyes excepting his own, and Victor Fairfax never suspected the fascination felt by his brother officer for his beautiful sister.

Then came the Civil War, and the friends parted, the one to remain under the Stars and Stripes and fight for the maintenance of the Union, the other to resign from the navy, bid adieu to his loved comrades, and go forth to battle against them under the folds of the Southern banner.

It was a sad parting between the two friends, and bitterly did they deplore the cruel cause that sent them as foes to face each other; but each was true to his own honor, as he saw it, and so they parted, to meet again that night when the Blue Blockader, under Victor Fairfax, headed straight for the Patrol, commanded by Herbert Marsden.

In the crash that came, the moment of deadly peril, and the sweeping on of the Blue Blockader, the two friends recognized each other.

After his crippled boat was seen not to have been badly damaged, and the crew began the work of repairing her, Herbert Marsden went to his cabin and from a locked drawer took out the miniature likeness of Beulah Fairfax.

Long he looked at it, and then sighed deeply as he placed it away, little dreaming that the time was near at hand when he should meet the original.

"I wonder if she ever looks at my picture, which I gave her brother?"

"I remember how very particular I was about it, when he said he wished to send it home to his mother, and I made the artist give me a number of sittings, until I felt that it was satisfactory."

"Poor Victor was so pleased with it, that he took off the frame I had gotten, and bought a most expensive one, and expressed it home."

"Before word came of its reception, the war divided us, and here I am in love with a girl I have never seen, a little arch rebel, I will wager, and whose brother has put at defiance our blockade."

"Well, the heart has strange likings," and he sighed.

Then came, as if drifted by fate, Midshipman Paul Stafford, to his ship, wounded and in distress, and it followed that the young sailor wished to be landed at The Retreat Plantation, the very home of Herbert Marsden's unknown love.

Was it a wonder then that the kind-hearted captain determined to see the youth to the spot he wished to go?

His officers thought that he must know of some special danger in the going, not to send them, for they knew not the secret their captain had locked up in his heart, about a beautiful rebel girl.

Swiftly, and with muffled oars, the boat went on its way, the midshipman having, during the day, pointed out to Captain Marsden the far-distant home of the Blockader captain.

Had he not done so the captain would have been on a blind hunt, for Paul Stafford's fever had brought on delirium.

As they went along the young sailor lay upon the stretcher, that had been temporarily placed in the large cutter, awoke, but silent, except when now and then he would speak in a low tone, the words not being caught by Herbert Marsden, who bent over him.

Excepting the light dip of the oars, there was no sound, and having taken his bearings by day, the captain held on his way straight as an arrow.

At last a glimmer was seen ahead, and a powerful glass was turned upon it.

The night was starlight, and the glass showed a mansion among a group of trees.

"That is the place," said Herbert Marsden, giving the bows a change of a point to starboard, and swiftly and silently the boat held on its way.

They had now come close inshore, but all was silent there, excepting the occasional cry of a night-bird and the wash of the light surf upon the shore.

The shore retreated from the beach to a hill, or ridge, which was heavily timbered, and at one point the forest was broken by the white walls of the plantation home.

Not only did Herbert Marsden, but also his men, realize the danger of their expedition.

They were about to land upon a shore held by the enemy, they knew, and were most likely to strike a patrol of Confederates, than not.

But Captain Herbert Marsden was a man that knew no fear, and he had promised Paul Stafford to take him to the home of his friends, and he would keep his word, outside of his own wishes for going there.

Heading for the pier that jutted out from the shore, no son reached its shadows, and then he sprung out and entered the little summer-house upon the ead, where the family were wont to go of an evening and enjoy the cool breezes from the water.

The place was deserted, and bidding four of the oarsmen lift the stretcher and follow him, and the others to come along with the marines, he started along the pier, leaving the coxswain alone in the boat, with orders to fire a pistol as an alarm-signal, should there be cause for it.

Along the pier they marched in silence, bearing the wounded midshipman, and reaching the shelter of a clump of trees, Captain Marsden halted his men there to await, while he went forward and reconnoitered.

Ascending the gravel path to the mansion, he saw that it was a spacious structure, with a score of rooms, large halls, wings and piazzas upon all sides.

In one wing a light burned, but the curtains were drawn.

"That is evidently a sitting-room, so I will try and have a look in there," he muttered, and as he did so he lightly ascended the steps and approached the window.

Through an opening in the curtain he saw an elderly lady seated in an easy-chair, and engaged in knitting, while upon his ears fell a soft, musical voice that was very winning.

He listened an instant and discovered that the one whose voice he heard was reading, and it took him but a short time to find out that the reader was perusing a daily paper from the town, giving an account of the daring escape to sea, the night before of the Blue Blockader.

"I would give much to see her," he muttered, but from her position in the room he could not do so.

"I wonder if there are others present, besides her mother and herself?"

"I must wait and see."

Soon the reader finished the article, and then followed some conversation upon the subject which had been read, and Captain Marsden heard but two voices.

"They are alone, and so I must knock at yonder door," he said, and he crossed the piazza to a door, which the arrangement of the house told him must lead into the room where the reader and listener were seated.

A light tap upon the door caused the voice of the reader to cease, for she had begun another article, and dead silence followed.

Then he tapped lightly again, and from within came the query in the same voice, attuned to sternness now:

"Who is there?"

"A friend who would see Mrs. Fairfax," and Herbert Marsden felt his heart beat violently as he uttered the words.

CHAPTER XXVII.

FRIEND OR FOE.

CAPTAIN HERBERT MARSDEN heard a few low words spoken within, and then came the query in the same voice:

"Who are you?"

"As I said, a friend."

"These are perilous times, sir, and we dare not open our doors to one we do not know, so I again ask who you are?"

There was no terror in the voice, as though of one in fear, and Captain Marsden determined to come boldly out at once, so said:

"I am the friend of your brother, Miss Fairfax, though at present we serve under different flags; but I declare to you I am not here as a foe, but a friend."

"You are a Federal soldier, then?"

"No, a naval officer; but I pray you do not be alarmed, for I have come on an important mission."

"I cannot open our doors, sir, and, if you

are, as you say, a naval officer of the United States, you will not intrude where you know your presence is not desired," and there was a clearing in her voice that showed she meant just what she said.

Then Herbert Marsden determined to play his trump card, and see if it would win, and so said:

"Miss Fairfax, have you ever heard your brother speak of his friend Herbert Marsden?"

There was an exclamation within, a few whispered words, and then came the reply:

"Often, sir, but he is in the United States Navy, and my brother in the Confederate."

"True, but I am Herbert Marsden, and I hope your brother has said enough of me to cause you to feel that you can trust me?"

Instantly the key turned in the lock, and the door was opened.

The vision of loveliness that confronted Captain Marsden almost took his breath away, and his thoughts were:

"I am glad I flattered the likeness I painted from, for even mine falls short of the original."

Dressed in white of some soft material, and fitting her perfectly, the exquisite form of Beulah Fairfax was the perfection of grace and beauty.

Her hair, caught up loosely with an ivory comb, hung about her neck and shoulders in beautiful *negligé*, while her face was one to see and never forget, so full of soul was it, so deeply impressive were the large eyes.

And the one she gazed upon was a model for perfect manhood, dressed in the full uniform of his rank, and with a countenance to win respect and command admiration.

"You are Captain Marsden, for I recognize you from your portrait," said Beulah, and she added:

"I am Miss Fairfax."

"May I say, also, that I know you from the miniature likeness your brother had of you? But let us not meet as foes, Miss Fairfax."

"We meet, sir, as a truce, yet we still are foes."

"My mother, Captain Marsden, for I believe that is now your rank?"

"Yes."

And Herbert Marsden bowed low before the mother, who extended her hand and said:

"Though foes now, Captain Marsden, you have been too dear a friend of my son in the past for me not to offer you my hand, if you will accept it."

"Gladly, madam; while I assure you that though I do my duty as a sailor of the United States, I cannot but feel that there are friendships which no differences or flags can sever."

"Then permit me to offer my hand, Captain Marsden, though I never expected to do so to a Union officer."

And Beulah's little hand was held out and grasped with a warmth that made her wince.

"Mrs. Fairfax, permit me to explain my intrusion upon you, and you will pardon me, I know."

"One moment, sir; can you tell me if the Blue Blockader got safely to sea last night, for, though our papers say she did, still she may have been crippled and captured?"

And Mrs. Fairfax seemed anxious.

"Had I you looked at our squadron during the day, madam, you would not have discovered the Blue Blockader among them, for she most cleverly deceived us and went off to sea like a hurricane, leaving every vessel out of sight that attempted to follow her."

"Thank God!"

"I am happy, madam, for your sake and Victor's, that it is so; but for ours, I regret we did not capture the Blue Blockader; but then it is just what I expected of Victor Fairfax, for I know his daring nature well, and no one I can name could have done what he did; but let me not tire you with my presence, but explain why I am here beneath your roof."

And Captain Marsden quickly told the story of the midshipman and that he had requested to be brought to The Retreat.

"Poor little Paul," said Mrs. Fairfax, while Beulah said:

"The brave, noble boy; but you have acted most generously, Captain Marsden, and risked your life for his sake, as the Confederate cavalry are liable to come to our home at any moment, day or night; but will you have Midshipman Stafford brought here at once?"

Herbert Marsden stepped to the door and gave a whistle.

It was answered, and soon after a body of men came forward toward the mansion.

"You four men bearing the stretcher come in; the rest of you stay where you are," he ordered.

Then turning to Mrs. Fairfax he continued:

"Remember, madam, if you are not prepared to assume the care of this young man, I can take him back with me on board ship, and he shall have every attention."

"Oh, not for a moment would I think of such a thing, Captain Marsden, for we will be more than glad to care for the poor boy, though at present our home is in confusion, as we are quietly packing up to remove the things to my town home—poor, dear boy," and Mrs. Fairfax

bent over the stretcher, which the men rested upon the floor, while Beulah said:

"He is delirious with fever."

"Yes, but he has a strong constitution and will pull through all right, I am sure."

"Now, lads, back to the pier and await me there, for I will follow at once," and Captain Marsden turned again to Beulah, as his men departed, and said:

"Miss Fairfax, permit me to say a good-night, but I hope not good-by."

"One moment, Captain Marsden; for I wish you to at least take a glass of wine beneath my roof, as my son's former friend."

"I do not dare call the servants, so will get the decanter and glasses myself," and Mrs. Fairfax left by an inner door, while Beulah said:

"That you may see that you are not unknown here, Captain Marsden, let me tell you that your portrait, which you gave brother Victor, hangs in our parlor."

"And you have not taken it down, or turned its face to the wall, since the war began?" he asked with a smile.

"Oh, no, nor will we, for we now know you are a friend, and not a foe."

"Yes, whatever the war may make me openly, Miss Fairfax, at heart I am your friend," and he spoke with a depth of feeling that Beulah could not but notice.

She was about to reply, when suddenly a form darkened the doorway, and a man in full Confederate uniform stood there, while his tone was sneering as he said:

"Ah, Miss Fairfax, you are entertaining Yankees, I see?"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

BEULAH AT BAY.

THE moment that Captain Marsden beheld the man in the doorway, and discovered that he wore the uniform of a Confederate officer, he dropped his hand upon the revolver in his belt, but as quickly removed it, folded his arms, and awaited the issue, be it what it might.

Of course he could not but feel that he had done wrong in not departing with his men; but they were by that time back at the boat, and so it was no use to bemoan what he might have done.

The words and manner of the Southerner showed that he was inclined for a quarrel, and yet in the presence of Beulah Fairfax, beneath her roof, where he had voluntarily come, he uttered no word, and would make no resistance.

"Captain Enders, I must say, that you have come at a most inopportune moment, sir, as it forces me to explain the presence of this gentleman here, which I do not care to have to do," and the voice of Beulah was cutting and cold.

"I can see no explanation of a fact that should not be, Miss Fairfax, for that officer wears the uniform and rank of a captain in the United States Navy, and you are a Southern girl, whom I have never before suspected of treason to our cause."

The face of the maiden turned deadly pale, while her eyes flashed brightly as she said:

"As I said before, Captain Enders, your coming here forces me to make an explanation, which I regret to have to do—to you."

"This gentleman came here to bring that poor wounded boy, you see lying yonder, and who asked to be brought to our home."

"He is, as you may recognize him, Midshipman Paul Stafford, and, left at the Haunted Light-house last night, with a companion, to discover the traitor who had burned a light there and revealed the Blue Blockader as she was going out, he was set upon, his comrade killed, he was wounded, and when he became conscious he was in his boat drifting out to sea."

"He had no oars, his dead comrade was by his side, and he hailed one of the vessels of the fleet, through which his boat was drifting, and thus taken on board he was not considered a prisoner by this officer, while, becoming ill with fever, from his wound, and asking to be sent here, his request was granted."

"He is sleeping now, as you see; but he will remain here, nursed by my mother and myself, while this officer returns to his vessel."

A meaning smile had settled upon the face of the Southerner, as Beulah spoke, as though he doubted, though in his heart he believed all she had told him.

Still Mason Enders was not a man to let go when he had an advantage.

He had loved Beulah for years, and only a few days before been repulsed by her in a tone that admitted of no mistaking.

He had a plantation half a score of miles away, which he had inherited, and his wild and extravagant life had gotten him deeply in debt.

At the breaking out of the war he had raised a home guard cavalry company, which acted as scouts about the seaport and along the coast, and he had found it convenient to pitch his camp not very far from The Retreat, where he could often see the woman he most loved.

A man of education, and born a gentleman, his disordered life and reckless career had caused many of his old friends to turn their backs upon him, but both Mrs. Fairfax and Beulah received him at The Retreat, knowing that he would

mend his ways, as he had become a soldier, and he had done so in a great measure.

But unfortunately for the time of Captain Marsden's visit, Mason Enders had only a few days before received a firm refusal of his heart and hand from Beulah.

He had often seen the portrait of Herbert Marsden in The Retreat parlors, and now recognizing the original, became viciously jealous, as Beulah had never gratified his curiosity when he had asked her about the one whose likeness it was.

"Do not think, Miss Fairfax, that I would doubt your word for a moment, and your explanation shows that what appeared treason on your part was but an accident; but it is my duty to take that officer prisoner, and I hope he will not cause me to use force in the presence of a lady, for I am well prepared, my men being just outside."

"In the presence of this lady, sir, I cannot offer resistance, while against the odds you speak of, I would stand no chance of escape, so I can but submit," said Herbert Marsden, though his voice quivered slightly, showing how deeply he felt his position.

"One moment," and Beulah stepped forward and held up her hand, as Captain Enders was about to advance toward Herbert Marsden.

"Well, Miss Fairfax?" and the Southerner bowed, though still wearing the cynical smile that seemed natural to him.

"You shall not take this officer prisoner, Captain Mason Enders, for he is here on an errand of mercy, to bring that poor boy whom he has just released, and honored himself in so doing."

"Duty is not to be trifled with, Miss Fairfax, and I must do mine," was the firm resolve.

Just then Mrs. Fairfax returned to the room, and it was plain that she knew all, having heard what had occurred.

"Captain Enders, this gentleman is my guest, under a flag of truce as it were, considering why he came here, and you must not disturb him, but permit him to go free," and as Mrs. Fairfax spoke Beulah glided from the room.

"My dear Mrs. Fairfax, it pains me deeply to do my duty in this case, as it conflicts with your wishes, but I must hold that officer prisoner."

"Have you not heard the circumstances of his coming?"

"I have."

"And yet you insist?"

"I must."

"Is there not just a little of revenge that is actuating you in this, Mason Enders?" was the stinging query of the old lady.

The man's face flushed, but ere he could make reply Beulah appeared in the door behind him and said quietly:

"Captain Enders."

He started and seemed confused, while he said:

"Well, Miss Fairfax?"

"Were you not mistaken about your men being with you, and are you not to-night, as you often are, riding alone, while your soldiers are in camp?"

He saw that she had made the circuit of the house and discovered that he had no men with him, and he hesitated for reply, when Beulah continued:

"Now, Captain Enders, I am a true Southern girl, true as steel, and I am willing to do all in my power for our cause; but I will not see wrong done, and you shall be beaten at your own game, which is from revenge, not patriotism."

"What I do, I am willing to have you report me to General Maury for, and I will abide by his decision if I do wrong."

"But you must not forget that while you did come alone, this officer did not, and unless you wish to bow yourself gracefully out of a bad scrape by accepting me as an escort through the back door of the house, I will see that you will be the prisoner, instead of this gentleman."

"Come, Captain Enders, I wish the pleasure of your company."

And placing her hand in his arm she led him toward the rear door, his face flushing, his eyes flashing, while he bowed to Herbert Marsden and said:

"You can see that I am the captive, sir; but when next we meet I hope it will be on a fair field and no favor."

Herbert Marsden simply bowed, and as Beulah closed the door behind her Mrs. Fairfax said quickly:

"Now, sir, hasten to your boat, for I fear Mason Enders is treacherous. Some day, when this cruel war is ended, may we meet again. Farewell."

The sailor bent low over the hand extended to him and departed, going rapidly down toward the pier, while a moment after Beulah entered and said:

"Mason Enders has gone, mother, and very angry with me; but I do not feel that we have done wrong in saving Captain Marsden."

"Indeed we have not, my child; we have but done our duty; but now let us call Sophy and the other servants up and look to the comfort of poor Paul, who has slept so soundly through all."

And Mrs. Fairfax left the room to call the

house servants from the outer kitchen, where they were awaiting the usual call to retire, while Beulah remained with the wounded midshipman.

Soon several negroes entered, and were greatly surprised at finding the midshipman in the sitting-room, and no one else near, to show how he got there; but Mrs. Fairfax told them simply that he had been wounded, and had been brought there, at his own request, to be nursed back to health again.

Then he was carried to a cosy room near by, and old Sophy instituted herself night-nurse, after which Mrs. Fairfax and Beulah retired to their rooms.

But Beulah did not go to sleep, for slumber seemed driven from her eyelids, but sat down by the open window and looked out upon the starlit scenery of land and water.

She had told Mason Enders to do as he pleased, about reporting what they had done, and yet appealed to his manhood to let the matter remain a secret, to be told General Maury by the midshipman when he recovered.

The young ranger captain made no promise, but with a cold adieu, mounted his horse and rode away, feeling that he had been conquered by a woman.

And seated in the window Beulah thought over all that had occurred, and the splendid eyes of Herbert Marsden rose constantly before her, to look into her own, and she felt in her heart deep regret that he was a foe.

As she gazed out over the dark waters, her ears suddenly caught the sound of a voice below, and glancing down upon the lawn she saw several forms steal out of the shadow of the shrubbery and advance toward the mansion.

Others followed, until she counted thirteen, and then in alarm, for she knew they meant mischief, she arose and hastened to her mother's room to tell her what she had seen and give the alarm, knowing not what danger threatened them.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE RESPONSE.

ANXIOUS to learn the result of her plot to prove Belle Lamar to be a spy for the Federal fleet, Clotilde Varona mounted her horse the second day after the flight of the Blue Blockader from port and rode rapidly out toward the home of Beatrice Benedict.

She found that maiden at home seated, as was her custom, out in the open air engaged in needle-work.

Fox appeared promptly to take her horse as she sprung to the ground before the cottage gate, and Beatrice gave her a pleasant welcome.

"Well, Beatrice, I am here to ask if you have made any discoveries?" she asked, anxious to know at once how far her plot had progressed.

"I will tell you, Clotilde, just what I did and show you the result; but first tell me if the Blue Blockader got through in safety, as I have heard?" answered Beatrice.

"Yes; and it was a daring run out that Victor made, but just like him."

"Yes; he is one to accomplish what he undertakes, and I have heard that he used a foil, which the fleet mistook for his vessel and fired upon, while the Blue Blockader slipped to sea by the Federal fort channel."

"Yes; such was the case."

"But you do not know whether the Blue Blockader was damaged, or any one hurt on board?"

"No; we had no means of ascertaining that."

"Fort Lookout opened very heavily upon the Sea Rebel, as we could hear, for I recognized the firing of the fort from the fleet, and I was fearful that Captain Fairfax or his crew might have suffered greatly."

And Beatrice looked anxious, which caused Clotilde to turn pale and say:

"I had not thought of that."

"Well, we will hope for the best; but now to the lady whom you fear that Captain Fairfax wishes to marry."

"Yes; what of her?" eagerly asked Clotilde.

"I wrote a letter in a disguised hand and sent it to her by Fox, whom I can trust thoroughly. Here is a copy of the letter I sent which you can read."

And Beatrice drew from her bosom the copy of the letter, and carefully did Clotilde read it over twice.

"You meant to have her consent to be the bearer of secret dispatches, Beatrice?"

"Yes."

"And then?"

"It would compromise her if she were captured at the rendezvous with the papers upon her."

"True, and that will send her to prison, and cause Victor to be disgusted with her."

Beatrice Benedict's face flushed, while she replied:

"It would cause her to be confined in prison as a spy, yes, and thus prevent her marriage with Victor Fairfax, and that, I thought, was the motive."

"It is."

"Of course she would be held until the end

of the war, as a spy, and this war will last for years, and thus the marriage would be prevented; but I cannot see how it would cause Captain Fairfax to look with disgust upon her, for she will but be serving her cause as I have mine."

"I was placed in a position where I could render our Government great service, and I did so, and finding that I could be valuable, I continued as I had begun."

"Of course it causes a great deal of talk about me, and many rumors are afloat; but still I guard my fair name, as before, and, in serving the Confederate cause, certainly do not feel that I err, though many questionable acts have to be done at times."

"Miss Lamar is a true Northern girl, and her sympathies and all are for the cause of the North; but she is not one, in my opinion, to do any secret service act for her country, where she would risk her life to serve it, I am assured, if need be."

"Here is her response to my letter," and Beatrice, who had spoken warily, not liking Clotilde's reflections upon her as an alleged spy, handed over the response which Fox had brought her from Belle Lamar.

It was as follows, written in a beautiful hand, and upon paper bearing the monogram of the fair writer, while there seemed no desire to disguise her identity, on the part of the young Northern girl:

"THE BREAKERS, Thursday.

"The letter of 'Spy of the United States Secret Service' has been received by the writer, and its contents duly considered."

"In response, Miss Lamar begs to say that she leaves it to the brave soldiers and sailors of the North to end this war by fair fighting on land and sea, and will not do that which her spirit revolts against to aid the cause for she is not one to play the eavesdropper, or the spy, upon even a foe, and hence 'Spy' must seek other means than through Miss Lamar to communicate with the commodore of the blockading squadron."

"And this is the answer of Belle Lamar?" cried Clotilde, with a wicked gleam in her eyes, when she had finished reading the letter.

"Yes, it is to the point, is it not?"

"It is, but it shall not save her."

"What would you do?"

"I wish you to help me, Beatrice."

"I cannot, for I will do nothing underhand now."

"If she had played into our plot to endeavor to help her people, then she would have indeed been guilty and I would have felt no compunctions of conscience in capturing her; but as she has so plainly given her views I will do nothing more."

"Then I will," was the savage reply of Clotilde Varona.

"What would you do, Clotilde?"

"I will yet make that girl do that which shall condemn her."

"I do not think that you can."

"Will you not help me?"

"No, Beatrice."

"You will let me have your messenger, Fox?"

"No, Clotilde; I will do nothing more against Miss Lamar."

"You are in earnest?"

"Thoroughly."

"Well, I shall act alone; so good-by, Beatrice."

And soon after Clotilde Varona was hastening back to the town, her horse in a sweeping gallop, and her face set with a strange determination in it, but it was a look of mischief.

CHAPTER XXX.

IN HIDING.

WE left Ernest Penton and the deserter at the Haunted Light-house after the attack upon Midshipman Paul Stafford and his comrade, Boatswain Buntling, so we must return to them now.

The deserter had been seen by the actions of his officer comrade that he was a bold, bad man, and one who would take human life without even repugnance to carry out his ends.

This the deserter did not like, for he was confident that both the midshipman and the boatswain could have been captured and not killed.

He had himself deserted, it is true, but he had been for long years at sea away from his old mother, and visiting the port near which she dwelt, he was anxious to see her, and so had asked permission to go and do so.

It was at once refused. Then a letter had come to him through his Northern address, and it told him how dearly his mother loved him and how she hoped to see him before she died, and that she feared death was not very far away, as she was growing old and failing fast.

Again he sought his commander and asked to go ashore to visit his old mother.

"And she in the rebel lines?" he had been asked with surprise.

He replied in the affirmative, asserting his willingness to risk capture, and even death; but he was laughed at, and it was said even by the officer that he wished to desert and go over to the enemy.

So the man turned away and that night he slipped overboard, when the tide was running in, and being a splendid swimmer, after a long struggle reached the shore.

He found only the grave of his mother, even

after he had daringly ventured into the Confederate lines, and suspected by some neighbor, whose home he visited, he had to fly, seeking a hiding-place in the Haunted Light-house.

To be captured by the Confederates he knew meant imprisonment, and perhaps death as a spy, while to be taken by his own people meant being shot as a deserter.

So it was that Ernest Fenton found him; but, though willing to aid the pilot, to regain his vessel in honor, and a pardon for some gallant service, he was not willing to be made a tool of to commit murder.

But he said nothing more then, to the pilot, though he brooded over the deadly deed that had been done.

Then, when the boat, with the dead boatswain and living midgy, had been set adrift, the deserter said:

"Now what are we to do, sir?"

"Find some place of refuge for you, as I shall go up to the town."

"It strikes me, sir, that there must be some hiding-place in this old light-house."

"So I should think; but to find it is the question."

"We can but look, sir," was the reply, and a thorough search was begun, and the result was a triumph on the part of the deserter, who found that one of the windows looking from the light-house could not be seen when within.

A close examination revealed a double wall, on the stairs, the entrance being made through a cupboard, the back of which was a door.

This, upon being opened, revealed a small room, crescent-shaped, about fifteen feet in length and from two feet at the ends to five feet in the center in width.

"This is the very place we wish," said the pilot, and their things were at once taken there, along with a mattress to sleep on.

The window before referred to gave light and air, and the closet—for it was nothing more—seemed to have been made for a secret receptacle, doubtless built by the first dweller in the light house, and unknown to the keepers that had followed him.

"I will go up to the city now, Coxswain, as you are settled, and you keep a close lookout for any blockader attempting to run out, and signal the fleet, should there be a start made by one before I return."

"Also keep your eye for two hours at night, on the point yonder, for a signal for my return."

"You may expect me between the hours of ten and twelve at night, for I will come at that time, if I get any information of importance, and at the same hours by day, though I hardly expect to come then, as I may be seen leaving the city."

"Now to find a hiding-place for our boat."

"I know one."

"Here?"

"Yes, sir; it is where I expected to hide, if I had not found the secret closet."

"Well, let us see it."

The deserter led the way to the shore end of the embankment, upon which the light-house stood, and there revealed one of the pier-spiles broken out, and the earth washed away so as to leave just space enough for a boat.

"I can pull the boat in there, and even at high tide could remain in it, as it would rise until the gunwales touched the pier flooring," he said.

"Yes, but a search might reveal the broken off pile."

"There it lies, sir, and I can stand it upon the stump beneath the water, and push it from within into place, making it fast with a board and couple of nails, so you see the boat is all right, though I shall stay in the light-house closet, for I would dislike being imprisoned for several hours by the tide, lying at length in the boat, as it would be a most uncomfortable feeling."

"You are right; but now I will get you to put me ashore," and soon after the pilot was making his way back to the Resort Hotel in the town, which was presided over by Landlord Ned Bedloe.

Returning to the light-house the deserter shoved the boat into the wash-out beneath the pier, rolled the broken pile near, ready for use, got a rope, board, hammer and nails, to have all in readiness to use at a moment's notice, and then sought his hiding-place in the light-house.

He had raised the window, to let fresh air into the little cuddy, and throwing himself upon his mattress was soon fast asleep, feeling secure in his hiding-place.

In the mean time the pilot had run the line of Confederate pickets, who, fearing no danger, were very lax in guard duty, and reaching the Resort Hotel just before dawn, had aroused Landlord Bedloe, greatly to that person's disgust, and ensconced himself in his comfortable rooms once more.

CHAPTER XXXI.

BEFRIENDED BY FOES.

WHEN Captain Herbert Marsden left the mansion of the Retreat Plantation he lost no time in getting down to the pier, along which he hastened until he reached his boat.

He fully realized that he had had a very narrow escape and knew that he owed it to the pluck of Beulah Fairfax that he was not then a prisoner.

"I see it all," he muttered.

"That young Southerner is in love with Miss Fairfax, and desperately so, and he was only too glad to catch me there."

"He knew me from my portrait, which he has seen there, remembered that I was Victor's boon comrade and felt jealous."

"He is a handsome man, and doubtless a good fellow, brave and generous under ordinary circumstances; but he was jealous enough to be wicked, and he would have been glad of resistance on my part to shoot me, and was only too happy to feel that he could make me a prisoner."

"But she does not love him, for that I could see at half a glance, and she had the nerve to save me, and I hope sincerely she will get into no trouble thereby."

"Now to get back to the ship with all haste, and I hardly think I can find another excuse for coming ashore to visit that lovely girl, for she is the loveliest being I ever beheld, and I certainly am captured heart and soul by the little rebel beauty."

Reaching the boat, Captain Marsden was hastily called by the sergeant of marines to spring into it, while he said in a low tone:

"There are two boats coming up the coast, sir."

The captain hastily entered the cutter, and looking in the direction indicated saw two boats upon the water, one following the other.

"They cannot be from the fleet, sergeant?"

"No, sir; for they have come right along the coast since we sighted them."

"They are not heading as though to round the pier."

"No, sir; they are heading as though to land upon it as near shore as they can go."

"Confederate patrol-boats, I guess, so we had better keep quiet."

"Yes, sir."

"After they have landed, if they make a landing, we can decide what is best to be done; but they cannot see us unless they come here, as we now lie alongside of the pier, and if they approach and we have to be discovered, we will have the advantage of firing upon them from an ambush, and thus get a good start in a race for the ship."

So saying, Captain Marsden kept his gaze upon the two boats and saw them run in to the pier and apparently make fast.

Then there were men seen standing upon the pier in a group, and their movements seemed to be very mysterious.

"Sergeant!"

"Yes, sir."

"I have read in the town papers, which we got hold of yesterday, that depredations had been committed along the shores, by boats from our fleet, upon the plantation homes, and this is not a fact."

"No, sir, not that I have heard of," answered the sergeant, while the coxswain said:

"I heard the men speaking of the same thing, sir, and it was said no order had been given to send boats marauding ashore."

"No such orders were given, for I asked Commodore Hazen about it, and certainly no commander of a vessel in our fleet would take the responsibility of sending a foraging boat ashore without leave, and yet we get the name of it."

"Maybe those boats are on just such an expedition, sir."

"So it struck me, sergeant, and more, I know that there are men along the coast, thrown out of employment by the war, who would be none too good to be guilty of thieving acts, knowing we would get the name of it."

"In fact there are French, Spanish and Indian half-breed sailors along the Florida coast, who are about as good timber for pirates as anything else, and I believe they have formed a marauding crew, and are doing this devilish work of robbing plantation homes, while in some cases they have taken human life when resisted."

"Now I shall find out just what those fellows are about."

The crew seemed more than anxious to follow their gallant captain's lead, and the boat was hauled around to the other side of the pier, and then drawn silently along by hand, down toward the point where the boats were, for the men had already gone ashore.

Arriving there no one was found in the boats, and, as they could not be gotten under the pier, a man was left in charge, with orders to hail any one coming back, and if not answered with the word "Patrol," to fire on him, or them.

Then Captain Marsden hastened shoreward with his men.

Reaching the arbor-vitæ hedge that bordered the lawn, he halted his crew and listened.

In the darkness he saw several forms standing here and there, as though surrounding the mansion, and lights flashed within, while distinctly to his ears came a loud knock upon the door.

"Who is that?" asked a man's voice from an upper window, and Herbert Marsden felt that it must be some negro servant, and was glad to see that the inmates were awake and on the watch.

"I am a Confederate officer, and have come to search this house for Yankee prisoners," was the reply.

Then came in the clear voice of Beulah Fairfax:

"This is the home of Captain Victor Fairfax, of the Confederate Navy, and hence no place to look for Federal prisoners."

"I know that there are Yankees here, and if you do not allow us to enter, we will break in the doors."

"If you come as robbers, you will be treated as such," was the plucky response of the maiden.

A rude laugh was heard, and then came the loud order:

"Come, lads, there's no one here but women, with a nigger man or two, and the place is rich with booty, so in with the doors."

A low-voiced cheer broke from a number of lips, who heard the order, and the men began pounding upon the heavy front door, when Captain Marsden cried:

"Follow me, men, for they are but pirates, as I expected!"

In a run the marines and sailors went toward the house, and as they dashed out of the shrubbery there came pistol-shots from the windows above, and then the words:

"In with the door, lads, or that girl will shoot some of us!"

Instantly there came in a voice that rung out in the clear night-air:

"Attention, marines! Aim at that crowd on the piazza—fire!"

A half-dozen muskets flashed together, and then came the words:

"Marines, remain here, to support us, or check their retreat to their boats."

"Sailors, follow me!"

With his sailors at his back, Captain Marsden rushed upon the now panic-stricken marauders, and a volley of pistol-shots followed.

Rallying his men, as best he could, the leader of the marauders attempted to beat off his foes; but they broke before the rush of the gallant tars of Uncle Sam and fled in a body toward the pier, leaving several of their number dead or wounded upon the piazza and in the yards.

The marines fired upon them as they fled, and then Captain Herbert with his whole force followed them up.

"Ho, the Patrol!" he shouted as he neared the pier.

"Ay, ay, sir," came from the man in charge of the boats.

"Set your boat adrift and haul off with the others!"

"Ay, ay, sir!"

And, just in time, the man in charge, who had suspected how matters stood and had let his boat go with the tide, seized the oars of one of the marauders' boats and pulled rapidly off, one being in tow.

Disappointed and driven to bay, the marauders turned and fired upon their pursuers; but the fire was hotly returned by the marines, and then all dashed up with pistol and cutlass in hand.

"We surrender! don't fire now!" cried the leader, who was wounded.

And instantly the marauders were surrounded and made prisoners.

"Sergeant, hail Tomkins to bring the boats back and then send after ours that is adrift."

"Iron these rascals with the handcuffs in the locker of our own boat, and then bring all, prisoners, dead and wounded, up to the mansion, where I now go to report to the ladies, that they may see it is not United States sailors that are marauding the plantations along the coast, for this is as vile a lot of villains as I ever saw."

And Captain Marsden hastened away and reaching the mansion beheld Beulah at a window, anxiously awaiting the result of the combat, and knowing just who it was that had come to their rescue.

"Miss Fairfax, upon returning to my boat, I saw two boats landing at your pier, so kept my men hidden, and seeing in your town papers that marauding-parties from our fleet were sent ashore at night, I was anxious to prove that we were belied."

"These men are coast-robbers, belonging to neither side, and I am happy in having captured all that have not been slain; and I leave them here while you send a servant to the camp of Captain Enders to take charge of them."

"Oh, Captain Marsden! how can we ever thank you?" cried Beulah.

And she hastily came down to the door, and a servant was dispatched for Captain Enders and his men just as the sergeant came up with his men guarding the prisoners, who were ironed, and the sailors carrying the dead and wounded.

"Place them there, sergeant, and, Miss Fairfax, if you will allow several of your negroes to stand guard over them with guns, which you perhaps have in your house, I will retreat, as I care for no collision with Captain Enders and

his Rangers, who doubtless heard the firing and is now on his way here."

And hastily bidding farewell to the maiden, who again and again thanked him, Captain Marsden and his men beat a rapid retreat to their boat, which was soon going over the dark waters as fast as the strong arms of its oarsmen could drive it.

Hardly had it left the pier, when Herbert Marsden heard the rapid clatter of many hoofs, and knew that Mason Enders had heard the firing in his camp, and was dashing to the scene with his gallant Rangers.

CHAPTER XXXII.

LAYING THE TRAP.

THOUGH provoked, in fact angry with Beatrice Benedict, for deserting her, as she termed it, without accomplishing the capture of Belle Lamar, Clotilde Varona was not disheartened.

"I can do it alone, as she will not help me," she muttered, as she rode along homeward.

"I know, in fact it is no secret, that Beatrice Benedict loves Victor—in fact who could help it?—but he never paid her marked attention, and I thought she certainly would aid me to place Belle Lamar out of his way, especially as she has been a spy herself and knew just how to act.

"But no, that letter of Belle Lamar seems to have won her over, and so I must do all alone.

"Let me see how I shall begin.

"Oh! I have a little plan, and I think it will work, and it must, for Belle Lamar must be in prison before Victor comes in port again, and Lieutenant Moore said he would be gone but a short time, as he was only going to Nassau.

"Now I will make Lawton Moore help me; but first to get a letter to that hated girl.

"Beatrice said in her letter that the rendezvous would be on certain days, at stated hours, and at the Indian mound near the plantation gate leading to the forest.

"I know the place, and it is about three miles from the Haunted Light-house, and nearly two from the mansion, and Fort Lookout, so a party could go in boats to the Light-house Point, march inland and capture her at the mound.

"That will be the way to do, and so to decoy her to the rendezvous, where Lawton Moore can capture her.

"This is my plan," and a wicked smile came over the beautiful face of the Cuban girl.

Suddenly she said exultantly:

"I have it! Buttons shall carry the letter," and she rode more rapidly on her way.

Arriving at home she threw the rein of her panting horse to a negro stableman, and said:

"Ben, I wish the carriage at the door in an hour's time, and send Buttons to me now.

"I will be in the library, tell him."

Buttons was the negro boy that usually attended Beulah and Clotilde on their horseback rides, when they had not other escort.

He was a shrewd negro, good-hearted and very lazy, failing to do anything that was not forced upon him.

His age was about twenty and he looked younger still.

He soon presented himself at the library door, and Clotilde said:

"Buttons, can I trust you?"

"Yes, Missy Clo, in course you kin."

"Suppose I promise you just twenty dollars in gold, if you deliver a letter for me, could you do it?"

"I jest guesses I kin, Missy Clo," said Buttons with a broad grin.

"Can you keep your mouth shut?"

"Yes, missy," and another grin spread over his face.

"Well, can you tell a lie?"

"I don't like to, Missy Clo, but I s'pose I could if you told me what ter tell."

"You have an uncle on The Breakers Plantation, I believe?"

"Yes, missy, Uncle Ned, and he are a awful smart man too."

"Would you not like to go and see him?"

"Yes, missy, but I couldn't git thar."

"Very well, if you do not think you know how you can reach The Breakers, when only a few guards are in your way, you can never earn that thirty dollars in gold."

"Thirty, missy?"

"Yes."

"I thoughted you said twenty."

"I will call it thirty."

"I thinks I could go, missy."

"Well, get ready, and tell the people you are going to The Retreat Plantation with a letter from me to your mistress, and then come here, and I will give you a letter which you are to hand to your uncle, Old Ned.

"He is to place it in the hands of the lady to whom it is addressed, and, as he knows how to read, he will see who it is for.

"Do this, and the moment you bring me word that you have done as I ask, I will give you twenty dollars, for here is a ten-dollar gold-piece for you now."

Buttons's eyes glistened as he left the room, while the plotting girl sat down to a desk and wrote a letter in a disguised hand.

This she gave to Buttons, when he returned, and he set off upon his way to fulfill his mis-

sion, while Clotilde, hastily changing her riding-habit for a dress and bonnet, got into the carriage, which was awaiting her, and drove down to the shipyard, sending her card to Lieutenant Lawton Moore.

"As I am still all alone, Lieutenant Moore, I have come to ask you to dine with me to-day, for I have a matter of importance to talk with you about," she said, as she approached the carriage, delighted at the honor done him.

"I shall be charmed, Miss Clotilde," was the response, and telling him the hour at which she wished him to come, the maiden drove away, muttering to herself:

"He will do as I say."

Promptly the young officer arrived and was ushered into the library, and a moment after Clotilde swept in, looking superbly beautiful, for she had taken particular pains to look her best, intending to use all of her powers of fascination upon the handsome naval lieutenant.

After greeting him warmly, she asked:

"And what news about Midshipman Stafford?"

"I have no good news, Miss Clotilde, for I went to the Haunted Light-house, but could not find any trace of him, or the boatswain, while their boat was also gone, so I fear he was captured by a force of the enemy, as I can in no other way account for his absence."

"That is too bad; but, Lieutenant Moore, I wish to ask a favor of you."

"It is granted before being asked, Miss Clotilde."

"Will you help me to capture a spy?"

"A spy?"

"Yes, sir, and a wicked one."

"Certainly I will," he said, with surprise.

"Give me your hand on it."

He did so, and grasping his hand a wicked smile of exultation passed over the maiden's face.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE RANGER CAPTAIN.

THE surmise of Captain Herbert Marsden was right, that the hoof-strokes he heard as he rowed rapidly away from the pier were the Rangers of Mason Enders coming in all haste to the Retreat Plantation, when he was alarmed by the firing.

After having been so cleverly managed by the pluck and presence of mind of Beulah Fairfax, Captain Enders had mounted his horse and ridden away, congratulating himself upon having escaped being taken prisoner, for he did not doubt but that the crew of the Federal officer were just outside the mansion, as the maiden had wished him to believe.

His camp was a couple of miles from The Retreat, and it was his wont to take rides alone at night, his men believing that he was going on secret scouting expeditions, while the almost invariable course he took was directly to the plantation where dwelt Beulah Fairfax.

While she and her mother had been in the town, the camp of the young ranger was not far from the home of Beatrice Benedict; but when Mrs. Fairfax and Beulah removed to the plantation, to spend a few weeks, and gradually get their things in readiness to remove to their town home, fearing that The Retreat mansion might be destroyed, Mason Enders decided that he would change his place of encampment, and he did so.

The place he selected was on a hill, heavily timbered, and, as I have said, within a couple of miles of The Retreat.

Nightly since the mother and daughter had been there, Captain Enders had either visited them, or ridden around the mansion, the quarters and grounds, to see that all was right, while he would also view the distant fleet with his glass.

On the night when he had found Herbert Marsden there he had been on his accustomed rounds, and seeing the door open, he felt there must be company, and so rode around to the back, and fastening his horse, returned to the front piazza with the result already known to the reader.

After his departure he rode back toward camp in no enviable mood, for he was full of jealous rage.

He had often seen the portrait of Captain Marsden in the parlor, and urged Beulah to take it down, as it was in the uniform of a lieutenant in the United States Navy.

But she had refused decidedly, and pointing to her brother's portrait had said:

"Upon that plan, Captain Enders, I would have to take Brother Victor's down also, for it is also in the United States uniform; but I will not do so, for Victor is proud of his service under the Stars and Stripes, and Lieutenant Marsden is now an honorable officer in the Federal Navy; but were he otherwise I would certainly not have his picture here."

So the portrait of Herbert Marsden became a bone of contention with Mason Enders, who was certainly more nonplused to find the original there and on most friendly terms with the maiden, who had, a few days before, refused his love.

Brooding deeply as he rode to camp, he ar-

rived there in no pleasant mood, and called to his camp-boy to look after his horse in a tone that caused the negro to mutter:

"Suthin's gone wrong wid de boss dis night, sure, and I'll jump lively or he'll let in outer me."

Hardly had the negro taken the bridle-rein when there came the distant report of firearms.

An instant did Mason Enders stand at his tent listening, and then he caught the exact direction of the sound and loud rung his orders:

"To horse, men, to horse! for there is work yonder for us to do!"

The bugler, half-dressed, dashed out of his tent with his bugle to his lips, and loud and clear rung the call of

"Boots and saddles!"

"My other horse, Joe!" shouted Captain Enders.

And ten minutes after riding into camp alone he rode out of it at the head of thirty dashing horsemen, and they dashed along like the wind, their destination The Retreat Mansion.

Arriving upon the grounds in a run, Captain Enders came to a sudden halt as he beheld a crowd before the piazza-steps, but hastily ordered a *detour* to surround them, naturally believing them to be enemies.

But just then a negro ran toward him and told him that Miss Fairfax desired to see him, while he further said that the men he saw were prisoners.

Dismounting, he quickly approached the piazza, where Beulah met him with extended hand while she said:

"I thank you, Captain Enders, for so promptly coming to our rescue with your men, for we could see how rapidly you were riding long before you arrived."

"But what has happened, Miss Beulah?" he asked, gazing at the prisoners guarded by half a dozen negro men.

"Those men, Captain Enders, are coasters, of a class that are reckless and desperate, and they came here to rob our home, and as one of their number was heard to say, to carry me off, unless a large sum of money was paid them."

"The United States officer, whom you saw, was about to depart in his boat, from the end of the pier, when he saw these men land, suspected that they were not Confederates, and returning with his crew, killed three, in the fight that followed, wounded several and captured the whole party."

"He has done a brave act, Miss Beulah; but where is he?"

"He put the prisoners in irons, and I set the negroes to guard them until I could send for you, dispatching a man through the woods to your camp, and who therefore missed you, as you came by the plantation road."

"Yes, I knew I could make quicker time that way; but your Yankee officer has done you a great service, Miss Fairfax."

"Pray do not speak of him as my Yankee officer, Captain Enders, for I hold no claim upon him, I assure you; but allow me to transfer the prisoners to your keeping, and the negroes will bury the dead, while I suppose we can look after the wounded here."

"No indeed, I will ask the loan of a wagon to bear the dead and wounded away, and my men can bury the one and care for the other, while those unhurt I will dispatch at once to the town; but let me say to you, Miss Fairfax, that I regret the affair of to-night, and would ask your pardon for my treatment of your Northern friend, for I might have acted differently toward one who has certainly proven himself so brave a man."

"I accept your apology with pleasure, Captain Enders, and let us be friends again," and she frankly held forth her hand which he grasped most warmly, and then turned to the prisoners.

"Bring a lantern, Ben, and let me have a closer look at these fellows," he said.

Taking the lantern brought him, he passed it over the faces of the entire party, dead and living, and said:

"You are a sorry looking lot of rascals, preferring to kill and rob innocent people, to going into either the Northern or Southern service; but it strikes me you met your match at the hands of a gallant Yankee, and as he has left you to my care, I shall see that your marauding days are ended," and calling to an officer he told him to start with the prisoners to camp, leaving several men to follow with the dead and the wounded, as soon as the wagons ordered came around.

Then he was called into the mansion, where Mrs. Fairfax, considerably unnerved by the scenes of the night, thanked him warmly and said:

"Whatever unkind feeling we may have had against you to-night, Mason, it has been obliterated by the ready manner in which you have served us to-night, so take some refreshments with us and then you can follow your men to camp."

Mason Enders was only too glad to accept, and he was delighted at the opportunity he had of again becoming a guest at The Retreat, as he had feared he would no more be welcome there, after his treatment of Captain Marsden.

"And how is your young kinsman, the midshipman, Mrs. Fairfax?" he asked, as they sat down to the table, which a negress had spread for them with choice delicacies, always to be found in a Southern home in *ante-bellum* days.

"He still sleeps, and I hope will recuperate rapidly, not only for his own sake, but because we are anxious to return to the city, as there is no safety here now, I will feel, after to-night."

"I think it best, madam, for you are very much exposed here on the coast," and Mason Ender was glad to see that Beulah did not advocate remaining, where she certainly could have an opportunity of seeing Herbert Marsden occasionally.

"While you are here, Mrs. Fairfax, my surgeon's services are at your command for Midshipman Stafford, who I hope, however, will soon pull through all right," and having enjoyed his supper greatly, the young Ranger captain bade the ladies good-night, and mounting his horse rode on after his men, who had departed with the wagons.

As he rode along, he said to himself:

"I feared that she cared for that Yankee officer far more than she would admit; but I guess it is all right now, and with her where she cannot see him, for he is a deucedly handsome fellow, I may yet win her love by a desperate siege."

CHAPTER XXXIV. CLOTILDE'S PLOT.

WHEN Lieutenant Lawton Moore promised Clotilde Varona to grant her request, when asked, he at once wished to know what it was that he could do, to aid her in the capture of a spy.

"You can do everything, for in fact I will have to depend wholly upon you; but we will first have dinner and then arrange our plans of action," she said, in her most fascinating way, and she took his arm into the dining-room, as the stately James, the colored butler, announced dinner.

It was a meal that Lawton Moore greatly enjoyed there, with the fair Cuban all alone; but he would have preferred it had James and his assistant been away.

Still, after dinner he would see her alone, and so he made himself as agreeable as possible, little believing the while that the beautiful and jealous Cuban girl was simply using him as a means to an end, and in no manner affected by his brilliant flow of language, for Lawton Moore was a good talker.

"Now, Miss Clotilde, to our little plot," he said, as she sat in the library after dinner, while he was in an easy-chair on the garden piazza, smoking a cigar and gazing in upon her.

She drew closer to the window as he spoke, and said, in a low tone:

"Lieutenant Moore, the spy I wish to capture is a woman."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, and a dangerous one."

"All women are."

"Don't be facetious, but tell me what punishment would be visited upon a woman spy?"

"By the Federals?"

"No."

"You mean by the Confederates?"

"Yes."

"Well, we cannot hang a woman in civilized warfare, so she would be placed in prison, I suppose, until the end of the war."

"And that would disgrace her?"

"No, for to be thrown into prison for serving one's country is no disgrace, Miss Clotilde."

She looked disappointed, but asked:

"Would she be kept away from every one in prison?"

"Doubtless."

"Allowed no visitors?"

"I should say not, Miss Clotilde."

"But she would not be made to suffer?"

"Oh, no, not more than by her prison life, and that is enough."

"Well, I can lead into your hands a woman spy, one upon whom can be found most compromising papers."

"I will be glad to capture such, Miss Clotilde, but would prefer it to be a man, for I would rather see a man hanged than a woman imprisoned," he said, gallantly.

"What are you to do to-night?"

"I have a little work to do to-night, Miss Clotilde, which you will doubtless hear of before morning," he said, with a smile.

"To serve as a foil for another blockade-runner going out, for I heard there was one ready for sea?"

He smiled, but made no reply, and she continued:

"Well, to-morrow?"

"I am wholly at your service, Miss Clotilde."

"Then take a boat, with several men, and row down to the Point whereon stands the Haunted Light-house."

"Carry with you blue uniforms to throw over your own when you have landed, and make your way through the forest to a place you can easily find from a map I will give you."

"Remain in hiding there for a short while, as

you must time yourself to get there by four o'clock, and you will see a woman approach on horseback."

"She will dismount to secure a certain parcel, and when she has done so seize her."

"She may be beautiful and try her fascinations upon you to get you to release her."

"She may plead that she is innocent, but do not believe her; do not allow her to destroy that parcel, but take the prisoner to your boat and return to the town, but do not arrive until after dark, and then take the spy direct to General Maury."

"But is she a spy?"

"Trust me for that, Lieutenant Moore."

"I must do so, but I hate to arrest a woman."

"The parcel you find her with will prove that she is a spy of the worst kind."

"That will be some compensation for arresting a woman."

"And Lieutenant Moore?"

"Yes, Miss Clotilde."

"Do not, under any circumstances, say where you got your information."

"Suppose the general demands it?"

"I will write you an anonymous note, in a disguised hand, pretending to come from one who knows all that is asserted in the letter."

"It will give you full particulars, the map of how to reach the spot where you are to find her and all."

"Let the general see the letter, and he will believe then that you do not know who gave you the information."

"You have a great head for plotting, Miss Clotilde."

And the young officer smiled admiringly.

"And I have a will and nerve to carry out my plot to the bitter end," she said sharply, and Moore muttered beneath his breath:

"I believe you; and, egad! she will command her husband, be he an admiral."

"Now, lieutenant, you may expect a letter from me in a disguised hand and conveying the map."

"Carry out all directions implicitly and you will not have a miss occur in my plot, as you call it."

"How I got my information I cannot tell you; but I do not wish to be known in this matter at all and ask you to help me, while I desire to keep a wicked spy from doing one side a fearful harm, as she can do."

"You can trust me under the circumstances, Miss Clotilde," remarked the lieutenant, and soon after he took his leave, for he had a dangerous walk before him.

CHAPTER XXXV.

ERNEST FENTON'S BOLD GAME.

IN THE Resort Hotel there was a confidential servant, whom Landlord Bedloe did not hesitate to trust with the knowledge that there was a guest in a certain room who was not to be known to any one.

This servant carried to that guest, Ernest Fenton, his breakfast, at a late hour the morning after his return to the hotel, and was told to tell his master that he was wanted at once.

Ned Bedloe went, and found the pilot enjoying his breakfast with the air of one who had nothing on his mind to trouble him.

"Sit down, Bedloe, for I have something to say to you," he said.

"Well?" and he sunk mechanically into a chair.

"Don't look so blue, man, for I am not going to get you into any trouble, I assure you."

"No one knows I am here, and I shall not go out except in disguise; but I have a plan by which we can enrich ourselves."

"How?" and Bedloe began to arouse himself, for gold was his god.

"You know that there is a large blockading fleet off this port?"

"Who does not?"

"There are just nineteen vessels-of-war, a hospital ship, a store-ship, and two transports."

"Well?"

"Seventeen of the cruisers will average two hundred men each, and the flag-ship and one other have got four and three hundred men respectively, and this makes three thousand four hundred, with the seven hundred added making four thousand two hundred men, not to speak of about nine hundred more on the hospital and store-ships, and the transports."

"What do I care for all this figuring?"

"I will show you, if you will have patience."

"I wish that you would, for I am very busy this morning."

"Well, it takes a great deal to feed five thousand men, and all on board have been paid off, and yet have no way of spending their money."

"They are tired of the common food aboard ship, and a cargo run out to them, of vegetables, fresh meats, such as beef, mutton, chickens and turkeys, not to speak of game, and fruit would bring its weight in gold."

"It cannot be done."

"Indeed it can, for I can buy the things here at the markets in a couple or more days, have them put on board a small steamer by night, for I know the captain, an Englishman, and she can ship out, for the forts will not fire upon her, and

my signals to the fleet will prevent the vessels-of-war from opening on me."

"I can agree with the steamer's captain to get him in safety to sea, and that is all he wants, for he is afraid to attempt to run the blockade, and our investment will sell in the fleet at an enormous profit."

"How much?" asked the practical landlord.

"Say it costs here five thousand dollars in gold?"

"Well?"

"Oranges, apples and other fruits, with fresh meats and vegetables, will bring there at least forty thousand, if not more, for the fleet's men are rich, having captured, as you know, a number of blockade-runners."

"I think you are about right, Mr. Fenton."

"I know I am, and you are not Southern, so have no sympathy that way, while it is really doing no harm, other than to make money out of the fleet."

"Why, each vessel will pay out gold like water, for what we take them."

"Will you take out the vessel?"

"Yes, for I know these waters well."

"You can disguise yourself and make the arrangements?"

"Easily."

"Charter the steamer and all?"

"I will pay the steamer nothing; for her captain to get her out safely is pay enough."

"Well, will you buy the freight?"

"Yes, with your money."

"Ah!"

"I will not have any money to invest, but if you will put up the five thousand, I will take all risks, and share evenly with you."

Landlord Bedloe thought for a moment and then said:

"Very well, I will risk the money, so go to work as soon as you please."

"I will disguise myself and go at once to see the steamer's captain, after which I will have a run through the markets, and order just what I need."

And so it was arranged that Ernest Fenton should carry out his bold game for gold, the landlord fearing to trust him, and yet fearing equally not to do so, for the pilot held him wholly in his power, from the secret of the past which he knew.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE DECOY LETTERS.

WHEN Belle Lamar mounted her horse and rode away from The Breakers, she took, as has been stated, the plantation road leading to the grand gate, which led in from the highway.

It was her intention to go to the Indian Mound,* for a short while before, Uncle Ned had looked in the door in a mysterious way, and beckoned to her to come out of the room.

She found the old man trimming the rose bushes in the yard, and he had cut for her a bunch of rare flowers, saying as he banded them to her:

"There is a letter among them for you, missy."

"A letter?" she asked, with surprise.

"Yes, missy, it was brought here by my sister's boy, who belongs to the Fairfax family."

"He was coming here to see me, missy, and says a gentleman gave him the letter to give to me, and I would know what to do with it."

"Buttons cannot read, so I saw your name on it."

"It is strange; but has that man dared to write to me?"

"I do not know, missy, who it is from," answered Uncle Ned, and so Belle went to her room, took out the letter from among the flowers, and tearing open the envelope, read, written in a hand she had never seen before, as follows:

"Permit me to say that I deeply regret the determination of Miss Lamar not to act, as was suggested in this matter; but, anticipating that she would do so, I made all arrangements accordingly, and all my dispatches have been left for her in the place of rendezvous."

"Package Number One she will find there now, and Package Number Two will be there at the time specified on the slip within so I must ask her to get those two most important communications and hold them until they are called for by one who shall ask her to deliver them to him."

"I would not ask this of Miss Lamar, only trusting that she would act as requested, for her country's sake, I did that which is now too late to recall, so if she will get Package Number One and Two, and hold them as directed, she will not again be disturbed in a like manner."

"May I ask that Miss Lamar consign this letter at once to the flames, but not, under any circumstances, to destroy the packages numbered, as they are beyond value to our cause?"

Thrice Belle Lamar read this letter through, and her brow clouded angrily, as she said:

"Can it be Ernest Fenton that is doing this?"

"Does he think that because he will do a base act I can be prevailed upon to turn spy against a brave foe?"

"Yet this is not his writing, nor is it the

* In various parts of the South there are mounds, or heap of earth to be found which are called "Indian mounds," as they are said to be the burying places of the dead.—THE AUTHOR.

same as the other letter brought by that little negro boy.

"I will have to do as I am asked, I suppose, and get those two packages and keep them, for they have my name on them, doubtless, and if discovered would compromise me and perhaps others who send them, and I would not wish even Ernest Fenton to be hanged through act of mine or duty neglected.

"I will destroy this letter and then ride to the rendezvous."

Lighting a match she burned up the letter, and putting on her riding-habit set out for the Indian Mound.

After a rapid gallop, she reached the plantation gateway, and quite an imposing entrance it was, and passing through turned off through the forest to the left.

A short ride brought her in sight of the Indian Mound.

It was a pile of earth, some seventy feet in diameter at its base, and rising to a conical-shaped top forty feet in height.

Years before it had been thrown up there and doubtless contained the bones of many generations of dead Indians.

On the summit a peach-tree had grown, and here and there upon its sides were pines of quite large growth, a few cedars and a magnolia-tree.

In this latter in a cavity some distance from the ground was a cavity where the bark had been cut when the tree was small.

Riding up the steep side of the mound and following the directions given, Belle Lamar found this cavity or cut in the trunk of the magnolia.

She was just on a level with it, and rising on her stirrup and glancing in she saw there a glimpse of paper.

Taking it out she saw that it was addressed:

"To

"OUR LADY SPY,

"Indian Mound Rendezvous.

"NUMBER ONE.

"To be found at

"THE BREAKERS PLANTATION."

The address was pen-printed rather than written, and the envelope was of linen, sealed tightly, and had evidently a number of papers within.

"I shall be forced to keep this in spite of myself and get the other one too when it comes; but I hope they will soon be called for, and the sender will not dare to assume what I will do again.

"I will leave this here until I come for the other."

And so saying she returned the package to the hole in the tree and rode slowly back to The Breakers, much worried at what she had had forced upon her in the way of playing the spy.

Her nature revolted at finding out by falsehood and deceit what would benefit one foe against another, and she had tried to make her answer to the letter she had received very strongly express her feelings, and she certainly thought that she had done so; but her receiving this second communication caused it to appear that she had not made herself fully understood to the writer, for again he had intruded upon her.

Who it was she could not conjecture, and little did she dream how strong a net was being spread to catch her in its toils.

Little did she dream that a jealous woman's love lay at the bottom of it all, and that she was believed to stand between that woman's love and the man she sought to win.

As she rode on her way back to the mansion, Belle Lamar's brow seemed clouded by thought, not alone brought there by the secret letters she had been forced to receive.

In her lonely moments her thoughts would go back to the days when she had met and loved Victor Fairfax, and when he, in return, had told her of his deep affection for her and asked her to become some day his wife.

He was a favorite with all who knew him, brave to a fault, whole-souled, generous, and his standing as an officer was second to none.

Coming from a proud old Southern family, he had been left large inheritances by his father and grandfather before him, and was considered the wealthiest officer in the navy.

It was no wonder then that he was a "catch," and when "caught" by Belle Lamar she was the envied of all her lady friends.

Captain Lamar had known the young Southerner since he was a middy, and had watched his career with deepest interest, so that he was most glad to have him for a lover for Belle.

But then came the breaking out of the war, the resignation of Southern officers, and among the first to cast his lot with his State was Victor Fairfax.

He had called upon Belle, told her what he had done, and told her that he feared the end of their engagement had come.

She told him in return that their love dream was broken indeed, for she could not marry one whose sword was turned against her father's heart.

Thus, loving each other, but following duty rather than love, they had parted, to meet

again, as the reader has seen, under strange circumstances and the scenes of cruel war, her father commanding a vessel that sought to destroy the craft commanded by her lover, and he defying the folds of the National flag under the folds of which he had been reared to manhood.

All these things did Belle think over, as she rode homeward that afternoon from the Indian Mound rendezvous, and her heart grew sad within her as she recalled the fact that she had, to save the life of Victor Fairfax, become the wife, the slave as it were, of another, and that other a villain.

It was no wonder that she felt sad, and her brow became clouded as she rode along, for it seemed to her that should the war end, between them a great gulf had been fixed which neither could cross, the one to the other.

That night, as she sat with her aunt out upon the piazza, both started as a light far away flashed suddenly up, and in an instant another appeared, illuminating the dark water nearly two leagues away.

"See, Aunt Ellen! see! it is a signal from the Haunted Light-house that a blockade-runner is going out," cried Belle Lamar, springing to her feet excitedly.

"Yes, and I saw two vessels in near the light-house, by the glare of the blue-lights, and I hope they will put back, now that they are discovered, for this war is a cruel thing," sadly said Mrs. Dorsey.

"No, aunt, they are standing out in spite of the fleet being warned—there go the signals from the blockading squadrons and those vessels are doomed, for Victor Fairfax is not their commander," and Belle Lamar kept her glass to her eye, awaiting the result most anxiously.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE BLOCKADE-RUNNERS.

At the time of which I write, there were, in the seaport in and about which the scenes of my story are laid, a large number of vessels of all classes and kinds.

To begin with the smaller ones, there was a vast fleet of "oyster-boats," ranging from three to fifty tons burden, and almost as many "coasters," formerly trading from the Rio Grande to Savannah, with merchant vessels, from the schooner to the clipper, and half a score of steamers.

Among the latter were half a dozen, or more, of the swift-running craft known as blockade-runners, which had sprung into existence as necessities of the war, to bring in the freights most needed for the Confederacy.

Many of these were private ventures to make money, principally armed abroad, but a few were vessels that were employed to bring arms, ammunition, military and hospital stores for the Confederate authorities.

So fearful were the risks the blockade-runners ran, in going in and out, that freights and cargoes were enormous, and a fortune was often made in one venture.

The "blockade" off the port into which the daring Blue Blockader had run in and out, was a close one, and in fact so rigid that the Sea Rebel had alone been the one to make a successful run, where many trials had been made.

Thus were half a dozen of the fleet flyers laid up in the port, awaiting a chance to steal out to sea.

Their cargoes, mostly of cotton, were on board, their crews were ready at an hour's call, and they were waiting and watching their chance to fly to sea.

The daring run in of the Blue Blockader had filled these "brethren of the sea" with great hope, though none seemed anxious to risk the death-guntlet through which the Sea Rebel had passed.

When she daringly ran out again, and in safety, hope that they could do likewise arose in the hearts of the sea brethren, and so it was decided by two of the fleetest of the craft to make an attempt.

There was no moon, the nights were misty, and generally dark just then, and so all seemed in their favor.

To aid them Lieutenant Lawton Moore had been called upon, and he had readily volunteered to go down with the Foil and do all in his power to help them out to sea.

Rumor had it that a most formidable iron-clad was building up at the port, and, lying low in the water, she would escape the fire of the enemy, in a measure, and be enabled to do great damage.

To carry out this idea, Lieutenant Moore determined not to make a "dummy" of his boat, as, lying low in the water, she might be mistaken for this alleged ram.

So he mounted a heavy pivot gun on board, and soon after nightfall started down the bay as an escort for the two very trim-looking blockade-runners that were to venture forth.

Not knowing whether there would be another treacherous signal from the Haunted Light-house, or not, he led the way, and lay silently off the ghost-like-looking tower, so gloomy and silent in its desertion.

But no light was shown, and the Foil stood on,

the two blockade-runners following about half a mile astern.

Just, however, as both were in a stone's throw of the Haunted Light-house, a flash-light suddenly appeared above them, followed a moment after by the throwing over from the top of a couple of blue lights.

The result was that the blockade-runners were illumined as at noonday, for a moment and, thus revealed to the Federal fleet, instantly alarm-signals were sent up, and answered by the fort, all was at once a scene of excitement.

But the blockade captain held on, getting under a terrific head of steam, and trusting in there being two of them, and the diversion in their favor by the Foil, which would be looked upon as the supposed formidable iron ram, that they would get through.

As the fleet began to get under way, to wholly guard the channel, Lawton Moore opened with his heavy gun; the flash revealing his vessel sufficiently to carry out the deception, aided by the deep boom and shrieking shot of the heavy piece of ordnance he carried.

The fleet bit at the "iron bait," and their best ships were signaled to go in force and attack the rebel ram, while the rest were to devote themselves to the two blockade-runners.

Then for a while all was chaos, the heavy guns pealing, the huge iron shot and shell howling and shrieking, the flashes of the guns, the signaling, and the air filled with rockets and blue-lights to lighten up the scene.

But the blockade-runners had now to shift for themselves, for Lawton Moore had already ventured too far, for the safety of his vessel, in helping the outgoing craft, and he had to put back.

This he did, though he was crippled in one wheel while going about, and felt that he would barely have time to escape back under the guns of the Confederate forts, beyond the Haunted Light-house.

Several of his men had been killed, others were wounded, and his decks and bulwarks had been badly torn up, while his pivot-gun had been nearly dismantled by a heavy shot.

But he repaired damages as well as he could, and by keeping up a well-aimed fire from the pivot, managed to keep at bay the three vessels that were hotly crowding him.

In his haste he had not time to land at the Haunted Light-house, as he had hoped to do on his return, and discover the treacherous one who had betrayed the going out of the two blockade-runners to the Federal fleet.

On the contrary, as he paused beneath the light-house, suddenly above him burned blue-lights, revealing clearly to the pursuing vessels the cheat that had been practiced upon them.

Then the United States cruisers opened more hotly upon the flying Foil, and it came very near a question of seeing her go down before them.

But, with dead and wounded upon his decks, and his ship badly cut up, while he kept his pivot-gun still firing upon his foes, he held on his way to the shelter of the forts, when observation seaward showed him that one of the blockade-runners had been sunk, and the other was a prize, lying alongside of the cruiser that had captured her.

Those captains were not Victor Fairfax, for he would have gone through in some way," said Lawton Moore, with the same view of the daring young blockade captain of the Sea Rebel which Belle Lamar had expressed.

So back to the town went the Foil, badly crippled, counting her dead and wounded by the half-score, and having well done her duty, though without result, and the people, roused by the heavy firing, and knowing the gallant part she had played, though uselessly, gave her welcome with three rousing cheers.

But hardly had she dropped anchor, when, in the darkness, a boat stole away from her side, and, filled with men, and with muffled oars, it held on back the way the Foil had come.

In the stern sat Lawton Moore, and his destination was the Haunted Light-house, for he hoped to find there the bold signaler that the blockade-runners were going out.

"Let me catch him, and I will put a rope about his neck, and swing him near the top of that light-house as a warning," was the determined utterance of the young officer, as he held on his way with the boat.

He had decided to make this night attack upon the Haunted Light-house, for he believed that, seeing the vessel return to the town, and no one remain to look up the one who threw the lights upon the outgoing blockade-runners, the signaler would not suspect further danger that night, and so fall an easy victim to a party surprising him in his lair.

So it was that the boat approached the light-house with muffled oars, and not a sound was heard as they glided alongside the dock and all sprung ashore.

Quickly Lawton Moore ordered his men to surround the tower, and it was instantly done.

Then he stepped to the massive door, and the key was in the lock.

The key was also turned from without, which seemed to be positive proof that no one was within; but still the suspicions of Lawton Moore

were aroused, and he felt that he could only quiet them by a thorough investigation.

Opening the door he entered the tower, lanterns were lighted, and the search was begun, the young officer leading the way, while without stood two-thirds of his boat's crew on guard, that no one should escape.

Slowly, surely, from top to bottom of the tower went Lawton Moore and his searchers, and nothing escaped their keen eyes, excepting the one for whom they searched.

And there, in the secret room of the tower, lay the deserter upon his mattress, calmly listening to his searchers, and yet prepared, with revolvers and cutlass, to cut his way out, should they, by any chance find him.

But the search proved fruitless, and the boat returned to the Foil, half the seamen declaring that they really believed that ghosts did dwell in the Haunted Light-house.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

ARRESTED AS A SPY.

THE day following the attempted run out to sea of the two blockaders was an exciting one in the harbor and town over which the Bonnie Blue Flag floated.

The report came up from the forts, that guarded the approach to the city, that one of the blockade-runners was visible, sunk in shallow water, with several cruisers about her getting out her cargo, while the other lay at anchor near the Patrol, to which vessel she was a prize.

The Foil lay at anchor near the shore, considerably shot-torn, and people who gazed upon her gave Lieutenant Lawton Moore full credit for his pluck in doing all in his power to aid the two vessels to get out to sea.

Then, to add to the excitement in the town, a squad of Rangers came into town, from the other shore of the bay, bringing with them a number of prisoners, several of whom were wounded, that had been taken the night before robbing the plantation of the Widow Fairfax.

A letter from Mrs. Fairfax to General Maury, the Confederate general in charge, told of her having in her house Midshipman Paul Stafford, and the circumstances under which he had been brought there by Captain Herbert Marsden, of the United States Navy, who had afterward defended her home from the coast robbers, the prisoners of the Rangers.

Lawton Moore had just returned from a fruitless search of the Haunted Light-house, and heard with surprise the story regarding Midshipman Stafford, and the death of Boatswain Buntline, for he had discovered no trace of a soul in the old tower where twice a traitor had revealed the out-going blockade-runners to the Federal fleet.

He heard with delight that the middy was in a fair way to recover, and with deep regrets that Boatswain Buntline had been slain; but the mystery of the Haunted Light-house he had been unable to solve.

After a rest he wended his way up to the Fairfax house, and was welcomed by Clotilde with a warm grasp of her little hand and a winning smile.

He told her of the unsuccessful attempt of the blockade-runners, of his losses, the story that came from Mrs. Fairfax, regarding Paul Stafford and the boatswain, the arrival of the coast robbers under charge of the Rangers, and last, of his thorough search of the Haunted Light-house.

Clotilde listened with interest to all and said, quietly:

"And yet, when Victor again starts into this port, Lieutenant Moore, he will reach it."

"I believe he will, Miss Clotilde."

"And how frightened dear Mamma Fairfax and Beulah must have been, while they owe so much to that noble Federal officer."

"It is just like Marsden, for I know him well, Miss Clotilde."

"And you could find no trace of any person at the light-house?"

"Not the sign of a human being."

"How strange!"

"It is passing strange!"

"And how gallantly you fought your little vessel last night, Lieutenant Moore."

"Oh, no, I merely ran as near as I dared, to give the runners a better chance."

"You are modest, sir; but now tell me if you got my letter?"

"I did."

"And you will go to-day?"

"Certainly, within the hour I start."

"You remember all that is to be done?"

"Everything."

"Tears and beauty will not cause you to release the spy?"

"Miss Clotilde, in the discharge of what I deemed my duty, nothing would cause me to falter."

"Well said, sir; but do not forget that I am not to be known in this matter."

"I so understand, Miss Clotilde, and will not betray you."

"Then I can say no more," was the answer, and soon after Lawton Moore took his departure from the residence, and half an hour more saw him with his four picked men going

down toward the Haunted Light-house in a light skiff, under a leg-of-mutton sail.

Seeking the wooded point of land, to which Clotilde had directed him, he there left his skiff in a small cove, and then, drawing the Federal uniform on over his own, while his men followed his example, they set off on a march inland.

Following the direction of a map, with written rules, which he carried in his hand, the lieutenant found the Indian mound without difficulty, and at once placed his men in hiding, in a position so that he could allow the spy to ride into an ambush and then capture her.

It was not very long before the sound of approaching hoofs was heard, and soon after a horsewoman was visible coming through the pine timber.

She had reined her horse down to a walk, and, though believing no eye was upon her, she sat her horse superbly, heading directly for the mound.

Before riding up the steep ascent, she drew rein and glanced about her, as though suspicious that some one was near.

Then she boldly rode up the side of the mound, and, halting by the magnolia tree, rose in her stirrup, and taking from the hole a package, glanced at the address thereon.

"This is Number Two," she said, and she eyed the writing and address closely.

Then reaching out her hand again, she took out the second package, which bore the same address, and was marked Number One.

Placing the two large envelopes securely in her saddle-pocket, she turned her horse to go, when suddenly Lawton Moore, who had crept close up to her, stepped forward and grasped her bridle-rein, while he said politely, yet firmly:

"Lady, you are my prisoner."

A slight exclamation escaped from the lips of Belle Lamar, and she turned slightly pale; but instantly she regained her presence of mind and said sternly:

"Unloose my bridle-rein, sir."

"I cannot do so, to-day, and I regret it for your sake, for you must go with me."

"You evidently mistake me for some one else, sir."

"No, I am aware of who you are."

"Then why take me prisoner?"

"It is my duty, and one I deeply regret."

"Are you an officer of the fort, sir?"

"No, lady, I am a sailor."

"Yet, you wear an army uniform?"

"True, but for a purpose."

"To what vessel do you belong?"

"Lady, I will tell you as we go along, if you wish to know; but you must accompany me, and, if you desire to let your friends know where you are, I would advise that you write a letter and make it fast to your saddle-horn."

"Why, sir, that would be useless, for my father, Captain Lamar, will quickly have me released, for there is some mistake in this, as I can see that you are a gentleman, and you would not willingly thus act toward me."

"Are you a daughter of Captain Leonard Lamar of the United States Navy?"

"I am."

"I served under him once, and again I say how deeply I regret the duty I now have to perform."

"Why, sir, where would you wish to take me?"

"To General Maury."

Belle Lamar turned deadly pale, in spite of her effort to appear calm, and she gasped forth:

"Who are you, sir?"

"Lawton Moore, late of the United States Navy, but now a lieutenant in the Confederate Navy."

"Oh, God! what does this mean?"

"It means much trouble and unhappiness for you, Miss Lamar, I am sorry to say; but I must ask you again to dismount, and go with me; but no, I will allow you to ride your horse to where my boat awaits, and you can turn him loose there, and he will return home, so I would suggest your writing the note of which I speak."

"I will do so, sir; but why am I made war upon, I a woman?"

"It appears to be your own act that causes it, Miss Lamar."

"And you are a Confederate officer, in the Federal uniform?"

"Yes, for I expected to enter the Union lines to capture you, and therefore disguised myself and my men, so as the better to pass muster."

"Your men?"

"They are here, as you will see; but let me relieve you of these packages," and he quickly took the two sealed envelopes, though Belle made an effort to snatch them from him.

"Now, Miss Lamar, we will start on our way," and placing his arm through her bridle-rein, and calling to his men to follow, he led the way through the timber, while the poor girl sat like one in a trance, almost dazed by her misfortune.

The four men followed in silence behind, and after a brisk walk the cove was reached where

the boat lay, and at the request of Lawton Moore Belle Lamar quietly dismounted.

"Here is a pencil and paper, Miss Lamar, and I will make the note fast to the horn of the saddle, so that it will be found."

And he gave the pencil and paper to Belle, who began to write, while the lieutenant and his men threw aside the blue uniforms and appeared in their own.

"I have written, sir, as follows."

And she read aloud:

"DEAR AUNT ELLEN:—

"I have been captured by a party of Confederates, and it is intimated that I will be held prisoner."

"The officer in command permits me to write this note to you, and I beg you to inform my father as soon as you can, but I wish neither of you to worry about me, as I do not think I shall long be kept a prisoner."

"I am treated with the greatest respect, and doubtless will be."

"I send this note back tied to the horn of my saddle, and Gypsy will carry it straight, I well know, while it was suggested that I thus send my friends word by the Confederate lieutenant who made me prisoner. *Au revoir.* Yours, "Belle."

Taking the note, when she addressed it, Lawton Moore made it fast to the saddle-horn, arranged the reins so that they would not become tangled, and with a blow of the whip started Gypsy homeward.

With a frightened snort the animal started off, and the tears came into the beautiful eyes of Belle Lamar as she saw her disappear from view in the timber.

"Now, Miss Lamar, I must ask you to take a seat in my boat."

She obeyed in silence, and soon after nightfall the skiff reached the town, and calling a carriage, the young sailor started with his prisoner for the headquarters of the commanding general.

General Maury read the card brought in to him by the orderly and said at once:

"Admit them."

A moment more and they stood in the presence of the Confederate general, and half an hour after Belle Lamar was sent forth to prison, the charge against her that of being a spy, awful proof of which was sustained by the telltale papers taken from her by Lawton Moore.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

A FAIR PRISONER.

WORN out with the exertions of the last few days and nights, and the scenes through which he had passed, it was not until he received a note from Clotilde Varona, urgently asking him to come up and see her, that Lawton Moore was able to find time to visit that jealous and scheming maiden.

But at last he found himself at the Fairfax mansion, and was ushered into the parlor, where Clotilde Varona gave him a welcome that made his heart throb violently, and his thoughts were:

"I believe she does care something for me."

Ah, blind fool! had he but known her heart in all its scheming to gain one love, which was all the world to her.

"I had a letter from Mamma Fairfax, over at the Retreat Plantation, you know, Lieutenant Moore, and she writes that she is still detained there by the illness of Midshipman Stafford, who was more seriously hurt than was supposed."

"Did she say how he was now?" asked Moore.

"Yes, she said he was slowly improving, and that his fever was leaving him."

"I am so glad to hear this, and I must make time to run over and see the poor boy."

"He will be glad to see you, I know, as will also Mamma Fairfax and Beulah, who now feel no dread of harm from the coast robbers, as Captain Mason Enders, of the Rangers, is encamped on the grounds to protect them."

"I am glad of that."

"Now tell me of your capture of the beautiful spy, as they call the lady you took prisoner?" and Clotilde anxiously awaited a reply.

"There is little to tell, Miss Clotilde, for I simply carried out your very explicit instructions, saw the lady appear, take some packages from a cavity in a magnolia tree, and so arrested her."

"You did well."

"So it seems, though it went against me terribly to arrest a woman."

"Bah! women are wicked as well as men."

"Do you know who this lady is?"

"I have heard that she was the daughter of one of the captains of the Federal fleet."

"She is, and her father is a noble man, and I can hardly believe that Miss Lamar is one to act as a spy."

"You had the proof?"

"Oh, yes."

"She is very beautiful?"

"She is wonderfully so."

"And do you know Miss Beatrice Benedict?"

"Oh, yes."

"Yet she is a spy."

"It is so said; but then she has heart and soul in the cause of the South, she has had brothers killed in battle, and accident showed her how well she could serve the country by Secret Service."

vice work, and she left a hospital as nurse to become a spy."

"And what were the papers found upon this fair Yankee spy?"

"They were well executed maps of our surroundings, the number of blockaders, and other vessels in port, the number of guns in the forts, and troops in and about the city, with the posts of our pickets, and the yard where the Ironclad is building; in fact, the two packages I took from her would readily hang a man were they found upon him."

"And her fate was to go to prison?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"There is an old brick mansion on the river, where a few Federal officers are held prisoners, and she was sent there, under the charge of the nation, yet strictly guarded."

"Her case has been referred to the Government at Richmond, and it is expected that she will be sent on there; but she is comfortably situated where she is, and will be treated with the utmost respect."

"I am sorry for her; but it having come to my knowledge, just how I cannot tell you, Lieutenant Moore, that there was a female spy in our lines, I found out what course to take to capture her, and I have to thank you for what you did for me."

"I suppose, however, her father will try to get her exchanged?"

"Yes, a flag of truce boat came to the forts this morning, and an offer of a Confederate general was made for her; but General Maury refused, as he said she was a spy and should be held prisoner until the end of the war, while he wished it had been a man, that an execution might end the matter."

"Did she deny that she was a spy?"

"Oh, yes, and said that she had been asked by some one unknown to her by letter to act as a spy and had refused; but the one who wrote her had surmised that she would do as requested and had placed the letters there, and could not recall them, so asked her to keep them until he sent for them."

"This letter she could not show, as she said she destroyed it, and hence her story was not believed, though she certainly looked truthful, and I half believe she is."

"Well, I hope they will keep her a prisoner, and send her to Richmond, for women should be punished as well as men, when they do wrong; but when do you expect the Blue Blockader back, Lieutenant Moore?"

"Within a few days at furthest, for Captain Fairfax was only going to Nassau after a valuable Government cargo, brought there by another vessel."

"And you think he will get in?"

"If any one can, Victor Fairfax is the one; but the blockading squadron is on the alert now, more than ever before, and the capture of Miss Lamar has incensed the fleet, so that a blockade-runner would fare badly, I fear."

"I do hope Victor will not be too reckless."

"So do I, indeed."

"Are there no vessels to go out soon?"

"Can you keep a secret?"

"Indeed I can."

"For twenty-four hours?"

"Yes, longer, if need be."

"I only ask you not to tell a secret within twenty-four hours, Miss Clo'."

"I pledge myself."

"There are four vessels to start out to-night."

"Four?"

"Yes, for we will soon have moonlight nights, and it is clouding up and will be quite black, so it is decided that four will start to-night."

"All blockade-runners?"

"Yes, though one can hardly be called such, it having run in before the blockade, and her timid captain, who is the owner, has been afraid to put to sea again, for fear of capture."

"But the past few days he has gotten his boat in some kind of trim, has put a cargo of fruit and vegetables aboard, I believe, and intends to run for a Northern market, it is said, and I'll wager, if he ever gets out, he'll never attempt blockade-running again."

"And the other three?"

"Are the Greyhound, Lady Stirling and Invisible, three flyers that have made several successful runs, but stand in great dread of the squadron they now have to venture through."

"Well, success to them."

"So say I with all my heart."

"But do you go out again as a helper?"

"Oh yes, I will do all I can with the little Foil, which is again in both fighting and flying trim, and perhaps, with five vessels to look after, two or three may break through the squadron; but don't tell my secret, and to-morrow I will come up and give you all the news; that is, if I do not get killed."

"God forbid!" fervently said Clotilde, while with a light laugh Lawton Moore replied:

"And fervently to that prayer, Miss Clo', I say amen; but I must be off now, and think of me when you hear the heavy guns booming to-night, while, if I am killed, don't forget me too."

"Good-by," and he was gone, to once more dare death at the cannon's mouth.

In the mean time Ernest Fenton was not idle with his plotting and planning for his own personal ends and safety in the future.

Having gained the money of Landlord Bedloe for his daring venture, Ernest Fenton set about arranging his plans accordingly.

He felt assured that he could make a snug sum of money out of his idea, of running fresh provisions out to the fleet, and as he ventured no money, he was certainly safe in the enterprise, for his secret signals would enable him to carry out his plans without danger.

With a view to repeating the game several times, if successful, he did not wish to raise any suspicion of his act, among the Confederates, so he determined to run out at the same time with several other vessels that were anxious to put to sea.

He saw the captain of the steamer he was to use for his purpose, and it was agreed between them that his craft should go free, if he would carry out the cargo for the fleet.

He then saw the captains of the blockade runners, that were to go out, and a time was agreed upon for the start, no one suspecting him in his disguise, of being a renegade and the traitor that had tried to have the Blue Blockader captured.

The result of his going the rounds was that a time was set and all arrangements made, and the pilot returned to the Resort Hotel in a most gleeful mood.

"We will be rich, Bedloe, very rich, mark my words, for this will bring in a large sum, and it can be repeated time and again."

So he said and so intended, and Landlord Bedloe was quite elated at the prospect, and something like a friendly feeling seemed to exist between them, so true is the sentence, slightly changed, that "gold makes mankind akin."

Leaving the hotel the pilot made his way through the lines, and in good time reached the forest of pines, where he signaled out to the light-house.

It was the hour at which he told the deserter that he would arrive, and his signal was quickly answered, and soon after the man came ashore in the boat after him.

"Coxswain, I have a grand scheme on hand, and there is money in it."

"You see there are three blockade-runners going to start out to try and break through the fleet, and I carry a vessel out at the same time."

"She is supposed to be a blockade-runner also, but she carries a freight that is mine, and it is nothing more than a cargo of fresh provisions and fruits for the fleet."

"That should pay well, sir."

"It will pay an enormous profit; but you are to signal the going out of the blockaders when the last one gets up broadside to the light-house."

"Have your lights all ready, and burn four, as a signal giving the number going out."

"I will be the last boat, for I'll manage that, and once they have started, it will be hot work for them; but my craft will be kept astern, and I shall begin to signal the flag-ship, so there will be no danger to us."

"I have here a letter to the commodore, telling him that he may expect them, and we too, so that the fleet will be on its guard, and I wish you to deliver it."

"Me?" cried the deserter with intense surprise.

"Yes you," was the cool response.

"Not I, for to go on board that flag-ship, where I am known to hundreds, would be my certain death, for I would be shot as a deserter as you should know, Captain," said the Coxswain with deep feeling.

"You must go, however," was the cool reply of Ernest Fenton.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE PILOT'S VENTURE.

THE cool effrontery of Ernest Fenton in telling him that he must go out to the flag-ship of the Federal blockading squadron and be with the ban of desertion against him caused a dangerous light to come into the eyes of the Coxswain deserter, and he began to feel that it must come to a struggle for mastery right there.

This feeling the pilot seemed to recognize as he caught the other's eyes and saw his chest heaving with suppressed passion, so he said:

"Coxswain, I am not such a fool as to tell you to put your head into the lion's mouth, nor are you such a fool as to do it; but we must work together in this matter, and I have prepared against any recognition of you."

"See! I have brought you a safe disguise, and you go there with a message from me to the commodore."

"Tell him you care for the lights to warn the fleet, and must get at once back."

"See, here is the rig of an old man, and he will never know you, even if he had known you well before."

"Now get into the rig, put me ashore again, and then hoist your sail and run out with this letter."

"The wind is fair for you going and coming,

and you'll have the tide on your way back, so will reach here before dawn if you do not remain too long on the flag-ship."

"I certainly shall not do that; but is there any news of importance up in the town?"

"There is, indeed; at least, to me, for a lady I think most highly of has been arrested as a spy."

"I can hardly believe it possible about her, for she seems so little like one who would do such a thing; but she was captured at a place where she received communications, and upon her they found most damaging documents, in fact so damaging that she has been sent to prison for the war, and, were she a man, they would hang her."

"She is the daughter of Captain Lamar, of the Rangers."

"Indeed, sir! this is most remarkable, and I feel deeply for the young lady, for I have seen her several times when ashore at the Breakers Plantation with a boat."

"Well, they have her safe in prison, that is certain; but it is my intention to rescue her as soon as I get this other venture off my hands, for I feel that I can do it."

"I will gladly aid you, sir, in anything that I can do to rescue that young lady," earnestly said the coxswain.

"Well, we will arrange a plan to do so, upon my return, for I shall come back at once from the fleet, as soon as I have received my money for my cargo, and then there will be time to see what can be done for Miss Lamar."

"Do they expect the Blue Blockader in again, sir?"

"Oh, yes, for Fairfax is a man to keep up that desperate gauntlet running as long as he can serve his Government, and what he brings in are of immense value to the Confederates, I assure you."

"I fear his good fortune must change soon."

"You fear so?"

"Yes, sir, for the pluck of Captain Fairfax has been my unbounded admiration, and I would really hate to see the Blue Blockader captured, while I am anxious to aid in the capture of all the others, of course."

"Well, he will get it some day, mark my words, for even his lucky star will have to set; but come, put on your disguise, and let me see how you look, and then row me ashore, Coxswain, for you have no more time than you need."

The Coxswain was soon rigged out in the disguise which the Pilot had brought, and certainly no one would have recognized him, for he looked the old coaster to perfection.

Putting Ernest Fenton on the Point once more, he raised the little sail of the boat, and sped away upon his mission to the flag-ship, while the Pilot set off upon his return to the town, and arriving there in safety, cleared the heart of the landlord by telling him that all was going well for his venture.

The next day all arrangements were completed, the fresh cargo was safely stowed on board, while the other three fleet-runners were loaded with cotton, then so precious.

At the appointed hour all were on board; the men were at their posts, the lights were put out, and the little cruiser Foil, under Lieutenant Lawton Moore, signified by a low whistle that all was in readiness for the start.

Slowly they moved away in the darkness, the Foil leading, and moving out of the anchorage-ground, they headed down the channel, made dangerous by obstructions of all kinds, known only to a skillful pilot.

Passing the forts in silence, the Foil signaling that all was right, they held on their way like black phantoms of the sea, and slowly approached the Haunted Light-house.

All was expectancy on board, and each eye was upon the somber tower, while there was the thought:

"Will our going out be betrayed to-night?"

The Foil passed slowly by, then one, two, three blockade-runners, each keeping close in the wake of the other, and the fourth was abreast of the light-house, and Ernest Fenton was at the wheel.

Glancing up he was wondering if his ally was there, when a bright glare nearly blinded him, and a ball of fire, it seemed, thrown over from the top, revealed the five vessels distinctly.

"Go!" yelled Lawton Moore in trumpet tones, and the five vessels bounded away like race-horses at the start.

They saw that they were discovered, for the fleet sent up rockets, the fort answered, and over the light-house still came the balls of fire until four had been thrown.

Then it was each vessel for itself, and the fleet for them all.

They knew that in their numbers lay their safety, and all felt that it was do or die.

The Foil, under her plucky commander, ran straight toward the fleet, firing from her huge pivot-gun, to attract the attention of the cruisers to her; but Ernest Fenton had already written the commodore that she was little more than her name implied, had a small crew, and would be forced back if attacked.

Once they had started the four blockade-runners separated, each taking the course its

captain deemed best; but while the others shot rapidly ahead, and quickly dropped the Foil, the fourth one, at whose wheel stood Ernest Fenton, lagged back, and kept off to itself, as though it meant not to risk the lane of fire; but the pilot had begun then to play his bold game to get gold.

In the minds of the other blockade captains there certainly was no thought of treachery on the part of the one who commanded the provision vessel.

They were surprised that he should risk taking such a cargo, one that could bring but a few thousands, so to speak, where cotton freight was worth a hundred to one of it; but he had explained that he already had his hold well stowed with cotton, and took the fruit, vegetables and other things upon a small speculation of his own.

The different blockade commanders had all known that the captain of the provision craft, as they called her, had been a long time in port, and looked upon him as a timid man, who had not dared run out, after his experience in coming in.

The blockade had doubled in strength since then, and they thought that he would rather let his vessel rot in the fort than go to sea and risk death and capture.

And such was the case, until Ernest Fenton argued him into an attempt to go out, nominally, when in reality he would be wholly protected by the signals the pilot would show.

The man was satisfied with being able to get his vessel out with a fair cargo of cotton in the hold, without danger, and planned with the pilot to carry his freight of provisions for a safe passage out to sea.

Ernest Fenton had a scheming brain, and he took advantage of going out with the other blockaders, so that he might not be discovered signaling, and would be supposed to be captured, when he bore too near the flag-ship.

His plan was to drop astern of the other vessels, keep well away from the Foil, and hug the shore, as though intending to take the in-shore channel.

By this means he would keep out of range of the cruiser's guns, and the flag-ship would signal the fort not to fire directly upon him, though to fire for appearance' sake, so that treachery should not be suspected.

It was to carry out this well-arranged plan that Ernest Fenton had held back.

The deserter had delivered his letter to the commodore, and so all would be well, he was assured.

He could see no reason why his plan would not work to a charm, for, after running awhile in the in-shore channel, he would pretend to fear the fire of the fort, and stand off through a swash channel toward the fleet, managing to round to near the flag-ship.

During his arrangements with the blockade-runners' captain, he had worn a disguise, a rough wig and beard, and the rude dress of a coaster; but once he had started, he threw off his beard and wig and came out as his natural self.

The deserter had signaled with his blue-lights, that the blockaders were running out, and the fleet was on the alert, so Ernest Fenton felt that all was well for him; but, far away off on the black waters there was an obstacle looming up that he had not dreamed of.

CHAPTER XL.

THE BLUE BLOCKADER'S PRIZE.

ABOUT the time that the Foil started away from the anchorage, leading the four blockade-runners, a vessel came swiftly along over the dark waters, heading toward the very port which the others were risking death and destruction to leave.

It was a beautiful vessel, if one might judge from her outline in the darkness, and she cut through the waters with very little sound, her huge paddles being so constructed as not to strike the sea with a heavy report.

The night was very dark, the sea was rough, and the wind was blowing fresh.

The vessel was a steamer, but carried no light, moving on her way like some huge black monster of the deep.

"Light, ho!" The cry came from aloft, and an officer on the quarter-deck called out in response:

"Dead ahead, is it not?"

"Ay, sir."

"Do you see more than one, my man?"

"Yes, sir; two, three, four—yes, a number."

"It is the fleet, Howard, so the blockade has not been raised, that is certain."

The speaker was Victor Fairfax, and he addressed his first officer, while the vessel was the Blue Blockader, returning to again try her chances with the Federal blockade squadron.

She had on board a most valuable cargo for the Government, and Captain Fairfax was more than ever anxious to get into port in safety.

"Will you try to run in, sir, at once?" asked Lieutenant Howard.

"Yes; I will hold straight on as I am, and I will take the in-shore channel for there will be water enough to float I am sure."

"If we are to be destroyed, too, it is better to be near shore, for I shall fire the vessel and take to the boats, rather than surrender."

"It will be a grand sight when the fire reaches her cargo, and I pity any cruiser near her when she blows up."

"Yes, Howard, if she has to go she may do damage in her dying hour; but see what we are making."

"Eighteen knots," was the response.

"Good! I'll run her at twenty and over in going in; but see how the depth is."

"Twenty-six fathoms!" called out the man who threw the lead.

"Well, with that much here on this shoal ground, we will have ample for the inshore run."

"Thirty fathom!"

"Ay, ay; that will do, my man; but let us have a look at the fleet."

"The lights of all the cruisers are visible now, sir."

"Yes; and we will see more lights than now in half an hour," was the suggestive response.

And on went the Blue Blockader, her hull the color of the sea and hardly visible, and straight toward the fleet she headed.

"There is the fort light looming up now! Every man to his post!" came the stern command from the lips of Captain Fairfax.

And the crew went quickly and silently to their posts.

Nearer and nearer drew the sea rebel to the fleet, which as yet had not discovered her coming so daringly in, and just as the crew began to wonder how long it would be before they were seen there came a vivid flash afar off and then a steady glare.

"Behold! Blockaders are passing the Haunted Light-house and are betrayed to the fleet," cried Fairfax.

"Will they put back, sir?"

"No, some one must venture now, surely, and they will aid us, for now the fleet will be watching them."

"Ha! there go the signals of alarm from the cruisers and the fort, and now comes the struggle."

"I made out five vessels, Howard; how many did you see?"

"Five, sir, and one was the Foil, I thought."

"So did I; aloft there!"

"Ay, ay, sir."

"How many vessels did you see by the glare on the light-house?"

"Five, sir."

"Ay, ay! now our chances are improving."

"Let her go, Mr. Howard, for all she is worth."

The order was given to the engineer, steam was forced on, and the beautiful vessel seemed to fairly crouch at times and spring from wave to wave.

She was still black as night, no light shining from her, and her course lay toward Fort Look-out.

A moment more and the cannonading had begun, rockets were sent up, the rapid discharge of the heavy guns illuminated the scene, and the glare lit up the sea.

The waters were not so rough in the bay, but the wind blew strong, and came down astern of the Blue Blockader, while the tide was also in her favor.

"She seems to fly! What does she make?" cried Fairfax.

"She is logging twenty-three and a half knots, sir," came the answer from the middy who held the reel.

A suppressed cheer broke from the crew, in spite of discipline, and Fairfax said, in his pleasant way:

"I don't wonder that you wish to shout, lads."

The four blockaders were now visible, each one taking its own course out, while the Foil was pluckily holding on toward the fleet and firing with her heavy pivot-gun.

"Moore should put back now, for he is going too far," said Fairfax, and then he added:

"What is that craft hanging back like a frightened dog for?" and he pointed to the vessel on whose deck stood Ernest Fenton.

"She is acting queer, sir."

"Her captain is afraid to run out, so means to put back, and is pretending to hold on to give the other three a chance."

"It seems so, Captain Fairfax; but see! there surrenders one of the blockaders!"

"You are right! she got a hard broadside that knocked the pluck out of her; but behold that strange fellow!"

"He seems to be signaling, sir!"

"By Neptune! but you are right, Howard."

"That fellow is signaling the flag-ship, for see, he is answered."

"Yes, sir; what can it mean?"

"It means that he is a traitor, and intends to surrender his craft."

"It is an arranged plan, sure, from his signals. But there! we are seen now, and will catch it."

"Steady there at the wheel, for the Sea Rebel is accustomed to iron hail," cried Fairfax, as a shot sped over him.

"Will you hold on as you are, sir?"

"Yes, Howard, until we get half a mile further in, when I shall head across the bows of that traitor, and take him back with me."

"It will be a fearful risk, sir."

"True, but it may be worth it, for a blind man can see that there is treachery on board that craft."

"I hope then we may get him."

"We will, if I run him down."

"Get your grapnels ready, and have men stand by, for I shall run alongside of him, make fast, and drag him back into port, for the Sea Rebel can do it."

The crew knew their commander, and they entered into the spirit of his capturing the traitor blockade-runner.

The Sea Rebel was well equipped with arms, such as muskets, rifles, revolvers and cutlasses, and they were ready at hand.

She had a very large crew, for Fairfax carried men to step into others' places, should death play havoc on board.

The Sea Rebel had now been discerned by the fleet, whose whole attention before had been devoted to the vessels coming out, and a hot fire was begun upon her too.

But there were now four vessels to fire at, for the provision craft was not fired on, and one had surrendered, and the cruisers were so scattered that they had to be careful not to hit each other.

This gave the blockade-runners a better chance, and the Sea Rebel went flying along seemingly with the speed of a shot.

Seeing that he was going to get through all right, Fairfax headed directly for the traitor craft, which lay far off back, her signals set still, and little dreaming that she was the object of the Blue Blockader's attention.

So like the wind the Sea Rebel bore down on her, rounded to with a whirl, ranged alongside, the grapnels were thrown and caught, and Victor Fairfax and a score of armed men at his back were on her decks before her astonished crew realized what the strange movement of the Sea Rebel meant.

"Ha! Ernest Fenton, it is as I thought!"

"You are my prisoner!"

Ernest Fenton was speechless, and before he could recover from his surprise he was knocked down and ironed, while the Blue Blockader held on her way into port, dragging the prize along with her, for the vessel had been taken with but a slight struggle, the crew seeming dazed by the boldness of the Sea Rebel's men in boarding her.

They were now in quiet water, and the crew having been placed in the hold, and the alarmed captain and his officers in the cabin, Lieutenant Howard was sent on board with a dozen men to take her back to the town.

The Foil had in the mean time drawn off, and another of the three honest blockaders had been captured, but one escaping out to sea.

The fleet had become considerably divided, and while several cruisers were looking after the captured blockaders, others were following the one that had escaped, and a few were standing boldly on after the Blue Blockader and her prize, firing heavily after her.

But little damage was done, and with a tow-line out to the slower craft, the Sea Rebel held on her way, passed the Haunted Light-house, the Foil gallantly covering the retreat of the two vessels, and was soon in safety beyond the forts.

"Place that man Fenton in double irons, and confine him in a state-room of my cabin, for I value him more than the prize," said Victor Fairfax, as the anchor was let fall, and thousands of soldiers and citizens, aroused by the firing, greeted the Blue Blockader from the shore with the wildest cheers, for again had she passed through the fiery ordeal.

CHAPTER XLI.

FAIRFAX'S STARTLING DISCOVERY.

THE arrival of the Blue Blockader in port, after having again run the gantlet of the Federal fleet, created the wildest enthusiasm, and her young and handsome captain was lauded to the skies and made a hero of by one and all.

The going out of the other vessels, two to meet with capture, was but another feather in his cap, for coming in, especially as his cargo was known to consist of those things which were beyond price to the Confederate Government.

The capture also by the Sea Rebel of the vessel which was now known to have been freighted for the benefit of the Federal fleet, was a great thing for Captain Fairfax, and he added to his laurels by sending the cargo to the poor of the town and the hospitals, while the vessel was confiscated by the Government, and her crew, with a few exceptions, were allowed to go their way, the captain being sent to prison.

As for the main mover in the treacherous venture, Ernest Fenton, no one seemed to know what had become of him, but Victor Fairfax had reported him to the general commanding and had been allowed to dispose of him as he deemed best.

Questioning the captain of the prize and some of his men, Fairfax gained certain clues as to

movements of Ernest Fenton which set him upon the track of clearing up several mysteries, and he at once put detectives to work to gain desired ends.

His mother and sister being at the Retreat, whither Clotilde Varona had also gone for a few days, Victor decided to remain at his home in town, for he wished the Sea Rebel to have a good overhauling.

There was one thing that seemed almost to stun him upon his return, and that was the discovery that Belle Lamar had been captured as spy and was then in prison.

He went to Lawton Moore and heard his full story of the capture, though the young officer, true to his pledge, did not say where he had gotten his information regarding the beautiful Northern girl.

Then he went to General Maury, who told him all that he knew about the affair, and also showed him the recovered dispatches and letters regarding the matter.

With a heavy heart did Victor Fairfax go to his home that night, and yet he could not bring himself to believe that Belle Lamar was guilty.

Talking to James, the faithful negro butler, upon the subject, that worthy threw out several hints which caused him to suspect that Clotilde was at the bottom of the affair, and he determined to at once write to her, send a special messenger across the bay, and ask her if she had really done one act to cause suspicion of being a spy to fall upon Belle Lamar.

His desk was locked and he had misplaced the key, so he went up to his sister's room to find pen, ink and paper.

But Beulah's desk was also locked, and he went to Clotilde's room, confident that he would there find what he wished.

By a strange fatality she had left the key of her desk in the lock, and Victor Fairfax uttered a cry as he opened it, for there before his eyes were telltale witnesses of who had been the foe of Belle Lamar.

There were half-drawn maps of Confederate works, lists of regiments, numbers of guns, and, in the same writing, a disguised hand, on the secret papers shown him by General Maury, were numerous lines written on scraps of paper.

"Thank God! she is not guilty, as I believed and hoped she was not."

"But how bitter has been Clotilde's hatred for here lies her whole plot before me."

"She has forced Moore to arrest Belle, after getting the poor girl into a compromising situation in some way, and it is her work from beginning to end."

"I will take these papers all as witnesses, and I will see first who it is that has aided Clotilde."

"Here is the name of Beatrice Benedict, also of Fox; but who is Fox?"

"Then here is Buttons put down for a certain work, and he is a negro boy."

"I'll sift the matter now, and begin by going to Lawton Moore, for he must tell me who sent him there."

To the lieutenant he went, and by diligent questioning discovered what he wished to know, though Lawton Moore tried hard to keep the secret, and really felt that he had done so.

Then, mounting a horse, he rode out to see Beatrice Benedict.

She greeted him most kindly, and felt glad that he had called upon her; but a feeling of bitter disappointment came over her when she knew why he had come.

She told him frankly of what had occurred, and then he knew that Clotilde, failing to get Beatrice Benedict to aid her more, had set to work to accomplish all in her own way.

"And a devilish way it was, too," he said, fiercely, as, after an interview with Fox, who was well paid to talk, he mounted his horse, and rode back to town.

Buttons confessed all he knew, when brought under the stern eye of his master, and with this chain of facts, Fairfax started for the other shore, running over in a small sail-boat alone and by night.

He had heard of the attack upon The Retreat mansion by the coast marauders, and was anxious to see his mother and sister, and to congratulate them upon having so true a friend and gallant defender in his old shipmate, Captain Herbert Marsden.

As before he arrived in time for breakfast, and warm indeed was the welcome he received from his mother and sister, while he at once noticed that Clotilde was constrained in her manner toward him.

Paul Stafford, the middy, had rallied, under the best of nursing, and Mrs. Fairfax said she and Beulah would remain until he was able to be removed, but that Clotilde was already restless and lonely at The Retreat, and wished to return to the town.

"I'll take you back with me, Clo'," said Fairfax, pleasantly.

"When do you go, Victor?"

"This afternoon, for I wish to be in the city by nightfall."

"I will go," she said, quietly, and she went to get all in readiness, while Beulah told her

brother the full particulars of Herbert Marsden's visit, and all that had followed it.

"You'd love him if you knew him well, Sis, for he's a splendid fellow," said Fairfax, and Beulah could not but feel that she did already love the dashing, handsome Northern officer; but this she kept to herself.

Paul Stafford was well enough to talk a little, so Fairfax heard his story, and felt assured that there was some mystery about the Haunted Light-house that should be solved.

After an early dinner farewells were said, and sad ones, for both mother and sister knew the danger the daring sailor was going to face, and with a fair wind the little sail-boat started on her return, Fairfax at the helm, and Clotilde seated near, silent and *distracted*.

After dropping the land well astern, Victor suddenly asked:

"Clo', why did you sin so against Belle Lamar?"

It was a home-thrust and she turned deadly pale, while she remained silent, her head bent low.

"Clotilde, answer me! how had she ever wronged you?"

"What do you know?" she asked, eagerly.

"All, everything."

"What do you mean by all?" she gasped.

"I will tell you that I know that you tried to force Beatrice Benedict to serve you, and then got your letters carried by a negro boy."

"I know that you drew up maps, descriptions of works, important information and plans, and sent them to her, that she might be caught with them and thus condemned."

"Moore has not betrayed you, and yet I know that you used him to carry out your nefarious plot."

"It was a success, and Belle Lamar is now in a Confederate prison; but what was your motive?"

"To win your love from her, and for myself," she replied, almost inaudibly.

"Clotilde, I have always loved you very dearly, ever since as a little girl, you became an inmate of our home, and I have known little difference between you and Beulah; but other than as a brother I can never love you, and I shall expect you to undo all you have done in this wicked work of yours."

"Oh, Victor!"

"I mean just what I say, Clotilde, you have committed a great sin, and actually turned spy yourself, for you placed in Northern hands that which was of vast importance."

"Miss Lamar did not use the information given her, but your wrong-doing was just as great."

"You got her into a Confederate prison, and I tell you frankly, you must get her out, for if you do not, all your heinous act shall be known, and she will be set free."

"Now you have your choice what to do."

"Will you plot to get her out of prison secretly, for my hands are tied, and I can do nothing, or will you meet the disgrace of your sin?"

"I will do as you wish, Victor."

"I felt that you would, Clo', for your sins are not of the heart, but of the head, and you are a true little woman, though you have allowed your foolish jealousy to get the best of you."

"When we get back to town you begin your plot to rescue Belle Lamar from prison."

"I can only help you, and her, after she is free, for, as a Confederate officer, I would not rescue a prisoner."

"If I went to General Maury and told him all, he would set Miss Lamar free; but I wish you to remain shielded, as far as the part you have played."

"Then, when she is free, I will take you to Cuba, to visit your aunt for a while, and when you come back you will have forgotten all about this silly love for me, and love me as you would an own brother."

"Now, Clotilde, what will you do?"

"All that you say, Brother Victor."

"Thank you, and you must begin at once."

"I will."

"I leave all to that fertile little brain of yours, for you have proven yourself a great schemer, Clo'."

"I have been very bad, Victor, I know."

"Well, you will not do so any more, and all will come well in the end."

"Once free, Miss Lamar can return to her father, and I will see that her fair name is cleared of the shadows you cast upon her, though I will not compromise you in doing so, Clo'; but we are nearing the town, and will not speak more on the subject, unless you need my advice about something you wish to do, and then it will be gladly given."

"God bless you, Victor!" was the low response of the poor girl.

CHAPTER XIII.

A WOMAN'S WILES.

"AND thus ends all my plotting, thus fades from me every dream of love!"

"I have lost him, for now he never could love me, but only hate me for what I have done."

"He demands that I undo my work, which he calls shameful, cruel; but he does not seem to

feel that what I have done, I have done for him, because he has been the idol of my soul, and I did not wish to lose him, to give him up, for it was more than death to me."

So spoke Clotilde Varona, half-aloud, as she stood in her room, after her return from The Retreat, and when she knew that she must obey the demand of Victor Fairfax, and release Belle Lamar from the imprisonment into which her jealousy had gotten her.

Having determined to obey, and do what she could to rescue the fair prisoner, Clotilde set about planning her way of action to consummate it.

She knew that Victor Fairfax meant not to aid her in the rescue, and did not wish to be known in the affair at all.

If need be, to shield her in the end, she knew his noble nature so well, that she was well aware that he would come to the front and declare any act he had done, and boldly give his motives.

But he had told her plainly, that where brain could devise such a plot as hers had, to get Belle Lamar out of the way, it could devise a plan also to rescue her.

So down in her easy-chair Clotilde threw herself, and closing her grand eyes, she began to think.

Plan after plan suggested itself, and then she looked worried, as none seemed to strike her as exactly feasible to carry out.

At last she sprang to her feet with the words, sharply uttered:

"I have it!"

Instantly she dressed herself for a drive, ordered the carriage and told the coachman to go to General Maury's headquarters.

She was aided to alight from the carriage, when she drove up, by Lawton Moore, who was just then going into the general's quarters, and she asked him to request a private interview with the Confederate commander.

"What, Miss Clo', more important information, and another head to fall, I suppose; but this time I hope it is not a girl's head?" he said with a smile.

"I would not be surprised if it was," she said almost bitterly, and a moment after was ushered into the general's office.

He knew her well, admired her for her wit and beauty, and leading her to a seat said pleasantly:

"Now, Miss Varona, tell me how I can serve you?"

"General Maury, I wish you to grant me a favor."

"Assuredly, if in my power."

"You hold as a prisoner Miss Belle Lamar, a spy, and I feel sorry for her in her lonely prison life and beg you to let me go daily to see her, to read to her, cheer her up in her desolate existence, and carry her little delicacies."

"May I?"

"Miss Varona, I said I would grant your request and I will, for I, too, have sympathy for that unfortunate, beautiful girl, and it was hard, very hard for me to believe the proofs against her and not her story; but I was forced to do my duty, and, as the Government leaves her care in my hands, I can; but hold her a prisoner, though I do wish to take away from it as much of the misery as I can, and how could I do it better than by allowing you to visit her?"

"I thank you, General Maury; and you will give me a permit?"

"Certainly, to go when you please and remain as long as you please."

And the general hastily wrote out the permit, signed, stamped and delivered it, and Clotilde felt most happy that she had thus far been successful.

Returning home she selected some books, got a few delicacies together, and other things to make prison life more endurable, and drove at once to the old mansion where Belle Lamar was imprisoned.

It was a rambling old structure, and there were half a hundred Federal officers confined there as prisoners.

These occupied the main body of the house, while a wing, overlooking the river, was devoted, on the second floor, to Belle Lamar.

Iron bars were over the windows, an iron gate barred the hallway that led to her room, and there, at the top of the stairs, a sentinel was placed.

Around the building was a military camp of one company, so that the place was securely guarded.

Showing her permit, with her sweetest smile accompanying, Clotilde was allowed to pass into the building, and the matron led her to the sentinel, who stood aside after opening the iron door.

"A leddy to see you, miss, and, poor dear, it's glad I am you'll have comp'ny, for she says she is coming often, and she's as beautiful as a picture," said the kind-hearted matron, entering the room ahead of Clotilde.

Belle Lamar sat at the grated window, looking out upon the river, and far down toward the United States fleet.

The room was a large one, not uncomfortable and well furnished; but the fair prisoner looked pale and a little haggard, but said pleasantly:

"It is very kind in any one to visit me, and I will be glad to see her."

So the matron ushered Clotilde into the room, and the eyes of the two met.

Years before they had met, and Clotilde had known of the engagement of Belle Lamar to Victor Fairfax, and that the war had broken it off.

Both seemed struck by the other's beauty, but Clotilde said, quickly:

"Miss Lamar, I am glad to see you again, for it has been years since last we met."

"I am Clotilde Varona."

"I remember you perfectly, and when we met in Saratoga, for you were there with your adopted mother and sister."

"It is most kind of you to come to see me in my trouble."

"I have *carte blanche* from General Maury to come as I please, if I will not bore you, and I have brought you some things—nay, don't thank me, I beg of you, for I am simply doing this for a purpose, and you may expect to be bored by me often," and so Clotilde ran on, nervously, talking to hide deeper feeling.

After half an hour's stay she departed, and the guard in the hallway received a piece of gold as a *souvenir*, and then she had a chat with the matron, who was also rewarded most generously.

And so it went on for several days, until all began to look forward to the coming of the beautiful girl with delight; but she took to wearing a heavy veil, and this some of the soldiers thought unkind in her, to hide her beauty.

In this way the designing girl knew each guard, and all duties pertaining to them, while she was aware, to the minute, just when they were relieved from duty, and who went on in their place.

With the permit of General Maury once seen, she went unquestioned, and even after night drove up to the prison to spend half an hour with the fair prisoner.

That she might not have to pass through the main building, an officer permitted her carriage to drive up to the door of the wing, where the matron had her room, and that old lady seemed to regard her as a being superior to ordinary mortals.

Baskets of flowers, edibles and looks were taken to Belle in great quantities, the guard never paying the slightest attention to what he passed in for her.

One evening just about dark up drove the Fairfax carriage, and Clotilde Varona sprung out, had a kind word for the matron, who was slightly ill and lying down, and ascended to the room of the prisoner, the guard saluting as he would an officer.

"Miss Lamar, I told you this morning that I was playing a game for your rescue, and to-night we must act," she said, sharply.

"And you remember I said I would do nothing that would get you into trouble," was the quiet reply.

"True, and I will not get into trouble, for when you leave port to-night, as you will, I will go with you!"

"You!"

"Yes, for it is best; but all is ready now for your departure, and you have but to throw my cloak, hat and veil on and depart."

"But you?"

"You will pass the guard, saying to him:

"Good-night, Rawlings, for that is his name."

"Descend the steps as quickly as possible, call out to the matron 'Good-night,' imitating my voice as well as you can, and spring into the carriage, which will drive off."

"And you?"

"I shall remain here just fifteen minutes, when the relief guard will be put on, and the carriage will return for me, for the driver will know where to take you."

"I shall talk aloud, as though to you, and when I see the carriage drive up will bid an imaginary person good-night, pass the guard and drive away to join you."

"But the matron?" urged Belle, anxiously.

"My dear Miss Lamar, she will be sleeping sweetly, for I gave her a dose of medicine, under a doctor's advice, that has doubtless soothed her to slumber ere this."

"The new guards will simply think the carriage has returned for me, as it has, you know, and all will be well."

"But that poor matron; I am anxious—"

"Don't be worried, for the dose I gave her was perfectly harmless, I assure you, only it will cause her to sleep for a few hours; but now you must get away before the relief guard comes around, so let me metamorphose you into Clotilde Varona."

And the Cuban girl laughed, but it was forced laughter.

CHAPTER XLIII.

A PLEDGE KEPT.

BELLE LAMAR hesitated, for, much as she longed for freedom, she did not wish to gain it at the sacrifice of another, and especially the beautiful Cuban girl who had been so kind to her.

When Clotilde again pledged her word

that she would quickly follow and there would be no risk if she went then, before the relief guard came, she accepted the situation and allowed the maiden to fix her up as she deemed best to carry out the cheat.

Belle Lamar was perfectly calm now, for she said quietly:

"Miss Varona, I will go; but if the carriage returns and does not bring you, then I shall at once come back here and give myself up, for I will not accept a sacrifice on your part."

"I have told you the truth, Miss Lamar, and shall follow you soon."

And the Cuban looked her straight in the eyes in a way that caused the fair prisoner to believe her honest.

So out of the room, with a farewell spoken aloud, and in good imitation of Clotilde's voice, went Belle Lamar.

She bade the guard good-night, and he saluted, while she went down the stairs through the room of the janitress, who was lying on the sofa, apparently in peaceful slumber.

Hesitating an instant, Belle heard her measured breathing, and gave a sigh of relief as she glided toward the door.

There stood the carriage in waiting, Ben, the negro coachman upon the box, and, getting in, it rolled away, passing the sentry on duty, who also saluted, for all the soldiers had come to respect and admire the pretty Cuban greatly.

Rapidly the carriage rolled on until it approached a cotton shed on the river-bank, and in its shadow it drew rein as a tall form advanced toward it.

"Victor!" half-escaped the lips of the maiden, but checking herself, she said as quietly as she could:

"Captain Fairfax!"

"Yes, Miss Lamar, and I am delighted to see you free," and he aided her to alight.

"Then you do not believe me guilty?" she asked in a low voice.

"I know that you are not," was the firm, almost stern rejoinder.

"Oh! thank you!" and she could hardly speak, while he led her to the shadow of a tree growing upon the river-bank.

Near the shore she saw a boat resting upon its oars, and with two men in it.

"Remain here, please, while I send Ben back to the prison after Clotilde," he said, and she earnestly returned:

"Oh! I am so glad to hear you say that, and to know that she has not deceived me—that I might escape!"

"No, she has laid her plans well, and will soon be here," and he at once walked back to the carriage, which rolled rapidly away in the gloom.

Returning to her, as though to avoid conversation, he called the boat ashore and aided her to a seat in the stern.

Then he sprung ashore, and standing under the tree with folded arms, awaited in silence.

He seemed stern, she thought, and yet that he was at the bottom of her escape, she felt assured.

Perhaps he was playing a part, Belle thought, and anxious and waiting, she remained in the boat, while he stood like a statue on shore.

In the mean time Clotilde was pacing to and fro in the room which had held Belle Lamar prisoner.

She heard the guard changed, and then every now and then she would laugh aloud, and talk, as though to some one with her, that she might deceive the man on duty at the iron gate in the hallway; but hearing the rumble of wheels, she started, and then throwing some wraps about her, pretended to say good-night to one within, closed the door and stepping briskly along the hall, approached the sentry.

"I thought I recognized your voice, miss, yet concluded the matron was in there with the lady, as I saw you drive away, I was sure," said the sentinel.

"No, that was a friend of mine, who got tired of waiting and went home, but sent the carriage back for me," and Clotilde spoke in the calmest manner possible, as she handed the soldier a month's pay in the infantry, and bidding him good-night tripped down-stairs.

There the matron still lay, quietly sleeping, and stopping for a moment she bent over her, while she said through her shut teeth:

"She is sleeping calmly; but it should have been for her the sleep of death, ay, and of those guards too, but that I got that woman free, and proved to Victor Fairfax that I could do any act for him."

Then she left the house, stepped into the carriage, and it was driving off, when a wagon coming into the gate caused Ben to momentarily draw up, and an officer stepped up to the carriage.

"Why, Miss Varona, is this you?"

"I could have sworn that I saw you drive away half an hour ago, for I stood here at the gate."

"Don't be too sure, Lieutenant Ramsey, for here I am in *propria persona*; but that was a lady friend, who had an engagement she must keep, so I sent her home and had Ben return for me."

"I raised my hat to her for you."

"Well, there was no harm done, and if you

knew her, you would lose your heart surely; but, Lieutenant Ramsey, it seems a shame to keep that poor girl a prisoner yonder, for she is so beautiful, so lovely in character."

"It is the beautiful woman that is the most dangerous, Miss Varona; but frankly, it is hard to see such a one a prisoner, and not a man in camp is there, who does not feel deeply for her and wish she was free."

"I am glad to hear you say so," was the dry response, while Ben having stirred the horses up, he said:

"But your horses are growing restive, so I will not detain you, much as I would like a chat with you."

"Good-by," she said softly, and held out her little hand.

And on rolled the carriage, while to her lips came the words:

"She is free, and I have kept my word to Victor and to her."

A rapid drive and the vehicle drew up at the cotton-shed, and Victor Fairfax sprang forward and aided her to alight.

"God bless you, Clotilde! you have redeemed yourself wholly," he said, earnestly.

She made no reply, and he felt that she leaned heavily upon him, and said:

"Poor girl! you now feel the strain; but all will soon be over."

"Yes, all will be well very soon," she said, hoarsely.

And bidding Ben good-by, Victor Fairfax led her to the boat, while the carriage rolled away homeward, the negro coachman proud of his master's trust in him and the part he had performed in the escape of one whom Captain Fairfax and Clotilde Varona smiled so to see free.

"Say nothing in the boat other than to speak to Miss Lamar," whispered Victor Fairfax, as he led Clotilde to the shore and assisted her to a seat by the side of Belle Lamar, whose warm welcome was cut short by Clotilde's warning grasp of the hand and a quiet:

"Good-evening."

Taking his seat in the boat also, Victor Fairfax said, sternly:

"Give way, men!"

Down the river he guided the boat until it ran alongside of the Blue Blockader, upon whose decks they all soon stood.

The boat was then hauled up to the davits, the order was given to get up anchor, lights were put out, and the beautiful vessel started toward the sea, once more to run the blockade against terrible odds.

CHAPTER XLIV.

FORCED TO OBEY.

WHEN Belle and Clotilde had gone on board the Blue Blockader, they had been at once invited into the cabin by the daring captain of the famous vessel, and he had said in his quiet way:

"Now make yourselves at home here, please, for we are going out to-night, and it may get rather warm upon deck, though I think we will have no trouble in running the blockade to-night."

"Do you think our fleet will be less watchful, Captain Fairfax?" asked Belle, with a smile.

"Oh, no; they will see us, beyond doubt; but I think your presence on board will give us good-luck, and my desire is, Miss Lamar, once I have gotten through the fleet, to send you on board your father's vessel."

"It is most kind of you, sir, and I owe you more than I can ever repay, for all you have done for me, while Miss Varona here has treated me as she would a sister, and risked much in my behalf," and Belle Lamar spoke with deep feeling.

"We have tried to do our duty, and that only, but I must go on deck now, and I pray you to keep below both of you, as we may come under fire, though I trust not," and Victor Fairfax went on deck.

He had a most valuable cotton cargo on board, which was pledged by the Government for arms, and he was most anxious to get through with it, while, on account of his two fair passengers, he was still more desirous of running the fleet gantlet without drawing the fire of the squadron.

How this was to be done the reader will soon discover.

Upon reaching the deck he found the vessel under way, and the first officer, Dabney Howard, in charge.

"We are in splendid trim, sir, and I hope we will be attended with our usual good fortune," said the lieutenant.

"I feel that we shall have even better, Howard," and turning to a midshipman, Victor Fairfax continued:

"Mr. Lucas, go below and fetch the prisoner on deck."

"You mean the traitor pilot, sir?"

"Yes, and leave the others until I need them."

A moment after the midshipman returned, and he was accompanied by a man heavily ironed.

It was Ernest Fenton, and he glanced anxiously about him.

"Mr. Fenton, we are now nearly abreast of

our forts, and when we draw near the light-house, I wish you to make a signal to your comrade there, to let us pass without burning the blue light, to give warning to the fleet of our coming."

"My comrade?" gasped Ernest Fenton.

"I mean, sir, just what I say, your comrade."

"I have no comrade there."

"Mr. Fenton, let us understand each other, sir, once for all."

"I captured you upon a vessel, going out to supply the Federal fleet with fresh provisions."

"I sifted your case thoroughly, and I found your hotel comrade, Bedloe, and he confessed all, preferring to confess rather than hang."

"Then I went to your light-house retreat, saw how matters stood, and I know that you have private signals with the man in charge there, who, from all I could learn of his story, as you told it to Bedloe, does not appear to be such a bad fellow."

"But he will be on the alert, and will signal the fleet of our coming out, if he is not checked, and you must signal him, and then hail, having him come on board."

"I do not understand you, Captain Fairfax."

"Mr. Fenton, let me make myself more explicit."

"You were born a gentleman, and your lax honor made a villain of you, so that you were forced to leave the navy."

"You sided with the North in this war, as you had a right to do, if such were your convictions of right; but you had no right to turn renegade against the South, and doing what no Northern officer of honor would do, become a traitor."

"But you did, and you sought to betray my vessel, and well-nigh succeeded."

"You saved your life by springing into the sea, and a vessel picked you up."

"As I would then have strung you up in the rigging, so will I do now, and run the gantlet of the fleet with you swinging there, if you do not obey every order I give you."

"I do not wish your life upon my hands, Ernest Fenton, but it shall be, so help me high heaven, if you attempt to betray me."

"Do as I ask, signal me through the fleet in safety, and I will set you on shore at Nassau, a free man, and not leave you penniless either."

"But fail me, and that moment your doom is sealed."

"I know what you can do, that you have a code of secret signals with the flag-ship, and that you can run this vessel to sea without a mishap, for I sent a man two days ago on board the flag-ship, as though coming from you, to tell the commodore that you would come out at the wheel of the Blue Blockader the next time she attempted to run the blockade, and would signal accordingly."

"Now the commodore is expecting these signals, and I will let you carry out my word, take the wheel, and have charge of the vessel, but a rope shall be about your neck the while, and passing it over the peak of the gaff, the other end shall be held by five stout seamen, who will run you up into midair, should the keel of the Blue Blockader touch bottom, or should a false signal be given to bring a shot upon us."

"Now do you understand me, Ernest Fenton?"

"I do."

"And which shall it be—your life or death?"

"Life."

"You mean it?"

"I do, if you will pledge your honor to release me in Nassau, to set me wholly free, and pay into my hands the sum of five thousand dollars."

"You show your nature, sir, thoroughly; but I so pledge myself."

"Then I will take the wheel."

"Do so."

"But you will not put the noose about my neck?"

"I will."

"You do not trust me?"

"No!"

"Yet I accept your pledge."

"We are different."

"Place a guard over me."

"No, the noose goes about your neck, as I said it should, and your doom is certain if you fail me in one thing."

"So be it; I must rest content— Great God! she on board this vessel?" and he started back, as he suddenly beheld Belle Lamar and Clotilde Varona standing in the doorway, for they had heard all that had passed.

But his eyes were riveted upon Belle Lamar, and it was of her that he spoke.

Victor Fairfax turned quickly, and his face flushed, for he had not seen the maidens there, nor suspected that they were eye-witnesses of what had occurred.

But he said:

"Miss Lamar was released from prison to-night, and is my guest until I pass through the fleet, when I shall put her in a small boat, with two of your crew, to row her on board of her father's vessel."

"The other lady, sir, you may know, is my

adopted sister, and is a protection for Miss Lamar."

"You helped Miss Lamar out of prison, Victor Fairfax, therein doing just what it was my intention to do."

"We will not discuss the matter, sir, further than for me to say that I did not aid Miss Lamar in leaving her prison; but to your post now, for we are nearing the light-house, and make known what signal to give."

With a muttered imprecation of some kind, the pilot took his stand by the man at the wheel, and the five men who were to be his exco-ners in case of his treachery came forward, as Victor Fairfax said sternly, addressing one of them:

"You have the rope-end all right at the end of the gaff?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then place the noose about that man's neck."

"Ay, ay, sir."

It was done, the pilot shrinking from contact with the rope.

"Now iron him!"

"Ay, ay, sir."

"What are you going to put irons upon me?" cried Ernest Fenton, savagely.

"Certainly, for I shall have no mistake about this matter."

"I cannot take the wheel then."

"There is no need of that, for I can run the vessel out; but you can direct the signals just as well with your hands ironed."

Again a muttered curse, and then Captain Fairfax said:

"Now, Pilot Fenton, what signal am I to give the man in the light-house, for we are nearing it?"

"Three red lights in a row," was the surly response.

They were shown, speed was slackened, and then came an answering signal from the top of the light-house.

"Good! now hail him, tell him who you are, and bid him come on board."

And at once the voice of the pilot was heard:

"Light-house, ahoy!"

"Ay, ay, sir," came the response.

"Coxswain, come on board, for I wish to speak with you."

"Ay, ay, sir."

"Tell him you will send a boat for him."

Ernest Fenton did so and a boat was lowered, and five minutes after the deserter stepped on the deck of the Blue Blockader and was instantly seized and ironed to his utter amazement and alarm, for he saw that he had been most cleverly caught in a trap, and that it was of Ernest Fenton's setting he did not have the slightest doubt, and his increasing dislike of the man with whom he had allied himself turned to the bitterest hatred.

CHAPTER XLV.

THE SECRET SIGNALS.

THE surprise of the deserter was greatly increased, when he turned to Ernest Fenton, whom he had at once thought had betrayed him, and saw that he, too, was in irons.

Then he discovered the noose about the pilot's neck, the rope running aloft, and the other end held by five seamen, and he felt that his doom was certain also, and mentally he forgave Fenton for his unjust suspicions of him.

"Do not be alarmed, sir, for I will do you no harm, only I was anxious that you should not signal the fleet of our coming, and so urged your comrade here to get you on board, which he was forced to do, as you see the position he is in," said Victor Fairfax.

"I am then a prisoner to the Confederates, sir?" the deserter said.

"Yes, in a measure; but the truth is, Mr. Scott Van Loo—"

"You know me?" gasped the man.

"Yes, I know that you were a good man, and true to the Union, and that you tried to get leave to visit your mother, was refused, though you expected to risk your life coming into the Confederate lines to see her."

"You deserted, swam ashore from your vessel, went into the town, found your mother dead, and, fearing to be shot as a deserter, you knew not what to do, so sought the light-house and thus met Ernest Fenton there."

"He promised to get you back into the navy with honor, if you served him, and you have done your duty well for your people, Mr. Van Loo, in signaling the starting out of blockade-runners, and I will so state to your commander in a letter and ask Miss Lamar to plead for you, for I desire to place her under your care, to return on board her father's vessel, as soon as we have passed through the fleet."

"You are most kind, sir, and I appreciate it."

"Then, Mr. Van Loo, as you have no reason for treachery toward us, I will release you now."

"Take his irons off!"

This was done, and then turning to Ernest Fenton, Captain Fairfax said:

"Now, sir, what are the first signals I show the fleet?"

"Two reds, sir, one to starboard, one to port, and thrice waved around the head."

"Repeat every half-minute until an answer comes from the flagship."

Two officers took the red lanterns, and each one stepped to his post and gave the signal.

Twice only were they given, before the keen eyes of the lookouts on the flagship saw them, and they were answered with two blue lanterns swung in like manner.

"Is that right, sir?"

"It is," answered the pilot.

"Now what next?"

"Five green lights placed in a row on the bow and kept there until the flagship answers."

"What will the answer be?"

"Three red lights in a row forward."

These signals were given and correctly answered, and then Fairfax asked:

"What next?"

"A green light at the foretop, a red light to starboard, a blue to port."

"And the answer?"

"She will set the same lights, sir."

"Are there any more?"

"No."

"You are then supposed to be all right?"

"Yes."

"And she will not be fired on?"

"Not unless you attempt to run away from her."

"You have other signals for conversing?"

"Yes."

"Can you state?"

"This is the Blue Blockader."

"I am in charge, crew all right, have passengers on board for the Ranger?"

"Yes, sir."

"The Ranger was the outer vessel of the fleet this afternoon at sunset."

"That is her station."

"Then you can signal that after getting passengers on the Ranger, you will stand on, in fact lead the flagship officer to believe you will run down to him and lay to."

"Yes."

"Then so signal, and let me again warn you that there is a rope about your neck."

"I am well aware of that, sir," was the reply, and the directions were given the two officers how to signal as Fairfax had demanded.

The signals were promptly given, and the response came from the flagship:

"All right."

Unable to remain in the cabin, in their great suspense, both Belle and Clotilde were now on deck, standing apart to themselves, and watching with the deepest interest all that was going on.

"You are taking desperate chances, Captain Fairfax, for see, you are now almost in the midst of the fleet," said Belle Lamar, as Victor Fairfax came near where the two young ladies stood.

"Yes, Miss Lamar, but desperate diseases require desperate remedies," was the response, and then he added:

"I am anxious to get through without a shot, with you on board; otherwise I would take chances as before."

"And I feel that you will do so, and that I will give my father a surprise within half an hour."

"Yes, within that time."

"And you, Miss Varona?"

And Belle turned to Clotilde, who was leaning over the rail, her head bent low.

"Oh, I shall go on with the vessel, for Victor has given me leave to visit some of my relatives in Cuba," was the response, and the voice quivered.

"Will you not first visit me, going with me to my Northern home?"

"No, no; I cannot, for I must go to Cuba, you know."

"Poor child, you seem nervous and ill; I fear all you have done for me has overtaken you."

"No, indeed; I am quite well, I assure you."

"Don't get blue, Clo', for all will come right in the end, little woman," said Fairfax, kindly.

She made no reply, but burying her face in her hands again bent over the rail.

"We are nearing the Ranger now, sir," said an officer soon after.

"Ay, ay; I will hail."

And in a moment Victor Fairfax sent his deep voice rolling over the waters:

"Ranger, ahoy!"

"Ahoy, the Blue Blockader!" came the response.

"That is my father's voice," cried Belle.

"Yes; and they know us, and the whole fleet seems dazed, expecting treachery somewhere," Fairfax remarked, and then he called out:

"Kindly send a boat aboard, Captain Lamar, when I round to."

"Ay, ay, sir!"

And the order was heard to lower away a boat as the Blue Blockader dashed by.

Getting as far away as he dared, Victor Fairfax signaled to slow up and round to, and the boat had some little distance to row to come up with her.

"Now, Miss Lamar, I will bid you farewell, and hope that some day we will meet again."

"Mr. Van Loo will be your escort on board, and kindly intercede for him, knowing the causes of his desertion, and say that his sister

from the light-house caused the capture of the two blockade-runners a short while since. Farewell!"

She grasped his hand, warmly, and he felt hers tremble, but she could utter no word, and turning to Clotilde, she threw her arms about her and kissed her.

But there was no answering embrace, and hurt to the heart, Belle Lamar turned away, while Ernest Fenton said, with a sneer:

"Have you no farewell for me, Miss Lamar?" "None, sir," she said, indignantly, and went over the side into the boat.

Then followed Van Loo and two of the seamen who had been on the Blue Blockader's prize, and which Fairfax set free, and the boat pulled away.

As it swung clear of the Blue Blockader the daring captain gave the order:

"Now let her go!"

Instantly the huge paddler revolved, and gaining rapid headway, the Sea Rebel flew away, to the great amazement of those on board the Ranger.

They could not understand her strange act, and yet she had given signals to the flag-ship which had been responded to.

Without a signal from the flag-ship, Captain Lamar could not fire on her, though it certainly seemed that the Blue Blockader was running away.

"Signal the flag-ship, sir, and ask if it is all right," cried Captain Lamar, in surprise.

"The boat will soon be aboard, sir, and then you will know," suggested the lieutenant-commander.

"Ay, ay, wait with that signal; but if she is not running off to sea, I'll go back to a middy's berth," cried the astonished officer.

"She fairly flies, sir."

"Yes, and I begin to feel that the Blue Blockader has duped the fleet once more; but stand by to receive that boat," and a few moments after Captain Lamar saw a slender form glide toward him, and then his daughter sprang into his open arms.

"My child! free, and with me once more!" he cried, with deep emotion.

"Yes, father, and I have much to tell you, if you will come into the cabin," and Belle was anxious to get her father occupied, so as to forget the Sea Rebel.

"First tell me where that vessel is going, Belle?"

"To sea, sir."

"Who commands her?"

"Captain Victor Fairfax."

"Then she is still in the Confederate service?"

"Oh yes, father."

"And has run the gantlet once more in safety, for we have been duped."

"It looks so, father," and Belle laughed.

"Clear away those guns, there, and open fire on yonder craft!" cried Captain Lamar, in thunder tones, while his orders followed thick and fast to go in chase of the Blue Blockader.

But Belle laughed again, for she saw that the fleet craft was now a long way off and her escape was assured.

The thundering guns of the Ranger aroused the fleet to the fact that something was wrong, and the flagship was signaled as to the true state of affairs, while Captain Lamar said in an undertone:

"If the commodore could signal profanity, he would fill the air with blue blazes and brimstone about this trick of the Blue Blockader."

But the shots sent after the Blue Blockader seemed to do no damage on board, though a midddy, holding a glass to his eye, said he saw a shell burst right over her quarter-deck and was sure that some one had been killed or wounded.

But on sped the Blue Blockader, until she disappeared in the darkness far away.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE CONFESSION.

WHEN Captain Lamar saw that chasing the Blue Blockader was like pursuing a bird on foot, he ordered the vessel to be put about and headed for the fleet.

"There's a craft in our wake, sir," said an officer.

"Ay, ay, and I think it is the Patrol."

"Go near her, pilot, and I will ask Captain Marsden to come on board, for you know him, Belle."

"Yes, father, and will be glad to see him," was the reply, and soon after the two vessels came within hailing distance.

"Patrol ahoy!" shouted Captain Lamar.

"Ahoy the Ranger!" was the reply in Herbert Marsden's fine voice, and he added:

"Was not that the Blue Blockader you went after?"

"It was a streak of rebel lightning, Marsden, I think; but come on board, as I have passengers I wish you to meet."

"No use going after the Blue Blazes, you think?"

"Don't burn Uncle Sam's coal for nothing, Marsden, for that blue Blazes, as you call her, is not to be caught."

"Ay, ay, sir, I will come on board, and the young captain was soon ushered into the cabin

of the Ranger, while the two vessels started back toward the flagship, running side by side.

The surprise of Herbert Marsden, and the pleasure at seeing Belle Lamar was great, and then the two officers sat down and heard her tell her story of her capture, imprisonment, and rescue.

"But you surely were not guilty, though you had the papers before you, Miss Belle?" said Herbert Marsden.

"I was guiltless of intention, yes; but not knowing who my unknown correspondent was, and wishing to keep the papers sent me, to prevent their falling into other hands, I was compelled to retain them, as requested, until they would be called for."

"The result was that I had them when surprised and captured, and I certainly cannot blame the Confederates for believing me guilty," was Belle's reply.

"And you had no clew to this correspondent?"

"None, father; but let me read this letter, which Miss Varona said would explain certain things, and to read as soon as I was with you, father," and Belle broke the seal of a large envelope, and drew out several pages closely written.

It was simply dated the day before, and bore the heading:

"MY CONFESSION."

Belle's face lighted up with amazement as she glanced over the written lines, and then she said:

"Father, this is a confession of a wrong done me by the very woman who rescued me from prison."

"It is from Clotilde Varona, tells how she was jealous of me, because she knew I was once engaged to Captain Fairfax, whom she devotedly loves, and sought to disgrace me in his eyes, by causing my arrest as a spy, and incarceration in a Confederate prison."

"She says that she drew those maps, wrote those telltale letters, and papers, and got me arrested, and that she alone is guilty."

"Also, that General Maury knew nothing of her plot, nor did others, and believed me guilty; but upon his return to port Captain Fairfax suspected her agency, and tracked her plot from beginning to end, and left her but one alternative—full exposure, or my rescue."

"As a Confederate officer he would do nothing to rescue me, though, after she had done so, he would carry me out upon his vessel, delivering me into your care, for he had as a prisoner Ernest Fenton, whom he would force to signal the Blue Blockader through the Union fleet."

"She also says that she has written a full confession to General Maury, as Captain Fairfax demanded of her."

"She is going to Cuba, she says, to visit an aunt, and so comes the end of her love and her sin, for she shall soon enter a convent's walls and thus atone for the past."

"These are her concluding words," and Belle Lamar read as follows:

"I have sent to General Maury a duplicate of this confession, so that he can clear your name of all suspicion, though he gives only the fact that you are guiltless, and will tell none of the facts of the case."

"It will be in his hands ere you receive this."

"As for myself, I am going to atone for the past by entering a convent's walls, so forgive me if you can, forget me, and farewell."

"CLOTILDE VARONA."

"Poor child," said Captain Lamar, with deep sympathy, while Belle's eyes were full of tears, and Herbert Marsden seemed deeply moved.

Running down to the flagship, Captain Lamar went on board, accompanied by Captain Marsden, and taking Belle and Coxswain Van Loo with him.

The old commodore soon heard the whole story, to his great surprise. But he welcomed Belle back under the protection of the Stars and Stripes, congratulated her that it had been no worse, pardoned Van Loo for his desertion, while for his valuable services promised him an appointment as a junior officer in the navy, and ended by saying that he hoped Fairfax would hang Ernest Fenton.

"But have we not been most cleverly caught in the trap that that brave fellow, Victor Fairfax, set for us?" he asked, and all thought that they had been.

"Well, some day I'll catch him, and if I don't, I am sure you will, when the war is over, Miss Belle."

Belle Lamar blushed, but in her heart she felt great bitterness, for up before her came the memory that she was the wife of Ernest Fenton.

CHAPTER XLVII.

CONCLUSION.

THE midshipman who had been looking through the glass from the Ranger's deck, and said that he thought a shell, bursting over the Blue Blockader, had killed some one, was right, for, through a strange fatality it had been Ernest Fenton.

Busy with getting his vessel out of harm's way, Victor Fairfax had not given the order to

take the rope off of Fenton, or the irons, and thus he had died, with the noose about his neck, the handcuffs upon his wrists, a piece of shell crushing him to the deck.

"Great God! what a retribution!" cried Victor Fairfax, and he had the body borne forward.

Seeing Fenton fall, Clotilde had at once gone into the cabin and thrown herself upon a lounge, her whole form seeming to writhe with emotion, but, after a sharp struggle she gained control of herself and appeared perfectly calm, saying firmly and aloud:

"Yes; it must be that I give him up, and we part at the first port."

And she kept her word, leaving the vessel secretly at Nassau and taking passage for Havana, while she left a note for Victor Fairfax, telling him that she stole away to save both pain at parting, but would go at once into a convent in Havana and devote her life to religion.

"Poor, poor girl! it is better so," said Fairfax, as he read the note, while his fine eyes dimmed with tears, for he had been deeply attached to the beautiful Cuban girl, though his love was only that a brother might have for a sister.

And back through the blockading squadron went the Blue Blockader once more, rushing through one night of storm, and she came to be regarded as a charmed vessel.

But upon going out again with a heavy load of cotton when the sea was running mountains high and the wind was blowing almost a tornado, she dashed into a vessel that barred her way and the fate of the Blue Blockader was ended.

That vessel she had come in contact with before, for it was the Patrol; but now the fleet gantlet-runner was to go down, while the cruiser received but little damage, and the gallant tars of Uncle Sam saved a number of the crew from death.

Among the saved was Victor Fairfax, and he was at once welcomed on board by Captain Herbert Marsden, who tried hard to keep him from going to prison; but without avail, for the gallant Blockader captain was sent to a Northern prison, and there remained until the close of the long struggle between the North and South, when he returned to his home on the shores of the bay where he had been an actor in such stirring scenes.

His mother still lived there, with his sister, and the two gave him glad welcome, while on the other shore, dwelling with her aunt at The Breakers, for her father had died during the war, was Belle Lamar.

By a strange coincidence Captain Herbert Marsden was placed in command in those waters, and one day he visited at The Retreat, and the welcome that he met with caused him to go again and again, until he received from Beulah Fairfax the promise to become his wife, as had Victor Fairfax already received from Belle Lamar the same pledge, though not until she had told him of her secret marriage with Ernest Fenton.

As for Lieutenant Lawton Moore, his failing to win Clotilde Varona did not break his heart, he being a sailor, and he compromised on his lost love by marrying Beatrice Benedict, who buried her deep affection for Victor Fairfax in the grave of "what might have been," where lie so many blasted hopes.

Paul Stafford recovered from his wound, and entered the army, where he distinguished himself as a brave cavalry officer, and old Uncle Ned now has a flourishing colored church in a Southern city, but each year pays a visit to The Breakers and The Retreat Plantations, where dwell the Brethren of the Sea, with their wives, one of whom captured a gallant upholder of the "Stars and Stripes," and the other, the man who carried the Bonnie Blue Flag of the Lost Cause so daringly above the decks of the Blue Blockader.

THE END.

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